

My Little Halo: Survival is Magic

by We are the Meta 19962

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Summary: When Twilight and Luna discover the "Forward Unto Dawn", they quickly warn the rest of Ponyville and go with Celestia and the Elements to the wreck site what they find surprises them. When Master Chief is awoken by Cortana, he must find a way to get off of the Dawn and survive in this strange new world.

1. Arrival

"Chief? Can you hear me?"

When John turned his lights on in reply, Cortana sighed in relief, "I thought that I'd lost you too."

As the Master Chief slowly awakened to his surroundings, he found that he was still floating in the vacuum of space. He pushed himself toward an opening off of one of the many supports ringing the narrow hallway. As he slowly drifted toward the opening, he grabbed the assault rifle floating next to him, "What happened?"

"I'm not sure. When Halo fired, it shook itself to pieces; did a number on the Ark. The portal couldn't sustain itself; we made it through just as it collapsed." Cortana said, as the Chief arrived at the opening, realizing that he was in only the back half of the Forward Unto Dawn; the front half was missing. "Well, some of us made it."

When John decided he had had enough of looking out into the black and blue void, he twisted around so he could push further into the ship. There was a cryogenic hibernation room up ahead with a holographic plinth for Cortana. As Master Chief drifted to the holographic projector, Cortana told him, "But you did it, Truth, and the Covenant, the Flood. It's finished."

When Master Chief placed Cortana into the projector, he looked down at the small data pad displaying her current status and agreed with

what she had said, "It's finished."

The Chief floated over to the weapons rack next to the cryotube, where he secured and locked his assault rifle into position. "I'll drop a beacon, but it'll be awhile before anybody finds us, years even." Cortana solemnly informed Chief as he drifted over to the cryotube. "I'll miss you," she said as the cover for the cryotube was closing.

Chief looked up at her and sincerely replied, "Wake me when you need me," and lay down in the tube, ready for the freezer to activate.

Cortana looked up in momentary surprise, then bowed her head as she placed her ally, and possibly good friend, into a deep hibernation that would last for a very long time.

Three Years Later

"Twilight, what are you still doing out of bed? It's way past midnight." Twilight Sparkle's small dragon assistant Spike questioned her. He had just woken up realizing that not only was his mentor still not in bed, but that it was also way past midnight.

"I know Spike, but I just can't shake this feeling that something is going to happen soon." Twilight quickly told him while starting to pace around the balcony that held her telescope (which she had levitated onto the ledge from outside, seeing as how it was way too big to carry up the stairs). She looked terrible. Her mane was out of place with small strands sticking out everywhere and her pupils were starting to become different sizes with one of the eyelids beginning to twitch rapidly.

"Well, what do you think it's going to be? Will it be good, bad, or just something random, like a meteor shower? That'd hardly be something to lose precious sleep over." Spike yawned, momentarily forgetting that Twilight had lost several nights of sleep over an almost tardy letter to Princess Celestia, Equestria's fair ruler.

"I don't know what it's going to be Spike, but I feel like if I miss it, I'll miss something very important. Don't worry about me, go to bed, I'll be there soon." Twilight assured Spike, so he went back to his small bed and promptly fell asleep. Twilight subconsciously regained control over her twitching eyelid since she was soon deep in thought. "Should I send a letter to Celestia? I don't think that this would be something of great importance that I should bother her with." Her thoughts were interrupted when a shadow stopped above her.

"TWILIGHT SPARKLE, WE ARE IN NEED OF YOUR ASSISTANCE!" Luna shouted using the royal voice. It was a wonder that she didn't wake everypony up. "I HAVE FELT A DISTURBANCE IN MY DOMAIN, FAR ABOVE THE LANDS!"

Twilight just gave up on seeing if Luna would wake anypony else up, seeing as how it was obviously not going to happen. "Yes Princess Luna, I'm here! What was this about something intruding into your domain?"

"I am sorry to have awoken you Twilight Sparkle, but it is of the

utmost importance that I use your telescope, for I cannot fly very far or high because of my injured wing and the Palace telescope is broken." Luna informed her very quickly, seemingly spooked about said object. This surprised Twilight, since not very many things could spook the tough-as-nails princess. "As I said, I would not have bothered you if it wasn't important, but this, object, is far larger than I had originally thought, and it is getting closer as we speak." Luna said with a still worried face.

"Alright Princess Luna, I'll let you use my telescope, just be very careful please; it's state-of-the-art technology and I would hate for it to be broken." Twilight said with curiosity and at the forefront of her mind, for she was beginning to wonder as to what this object was as well.

"Many thanks Twilight Sparkle, I am very grateful!" exclaimed Luna. So, she led the Princess of the Night to where her telescope sat on the balcony. Twilight trotted over to one side of her balcony as she patiently waited for Luna to find what she had felt. It was fairly easy to know when Luna suddenly cried out.

"Twilight! You must see this! It has not yet entered the atmosphere, but it soon will!" The tone of Luna's voice surprised Twilight yet again, seeing as how not only was Luna worried about this object, but now also very scared.

Twilight quickly paced over to the telescope and nearly put an eye out trying to see into it. It took her a little while, but when she found what Luna was speaking of, she reeled back in shock. She quickly looked up at Luna, who nodded and motioned for Twilight to look again. As she slowly placed her eye back to the telescope, she studied the strange object. It was humongous first of all, easily the size of most of Ponyville. Next, even stranger, the entire behemoth appeared to be completely made out of a reflective substance, showing that it was all made out of metal. Third, was the fact that the object looked as though it was torn in half. On one side, there were all of these jagged edges that could not have been there naturally. Then, she noticed that the object was rotating in a clockwise direction. What she saw next, surprised her the most. There was writing on the side of the metal giant. It was very similar to the common text of Equestria, just a few small differences, like a line moved, or a curve added.

Twilight, stepped away from her telescope and looked up at Luna, confusion in her eyes. "Luna, did you happen to see the writing on surface of this object?"

Luna looked at Twilight with surprise, "No, I did see not any writing. Why? What have you seen?"

Twilight, who was still wondering how the writing could be so close to their own, looked at Luna. "The writing on the side of it, it's so close to our own, it might as well be the same. What I read on the side of that strange object, were the words "Forward Unto Dawn"."

2. The Impact of being Awoken

"Chief! Wake up! I need you!" Cortana's frantic yelling cut through

the haze that was clouding the Chief's thought process. "Chief, if you don't wake up now, we are both. Going. To. Die!" Cortana started screaming, momentarily flashing red. It was this little detail that caught the chief's attention. That little flash of red began to worry him as he quickly climbed out of the cryotube, but he just took that worry, and shoved it down to a spot in his mind where it would not bother him.

"I'm here Cortana, what is it?" Chief quickly became concerned again when it took Cortana three seconds to answer him back, but he just pushed it down again.

"Chief," Cortana began weakly, then quickly regained her composure, "Master Chief, we are currently falling into the atmosphere of an unknown planet. I did the best I could with scanning, seeing as how we only have the most rudimentary equipment. This planet is only about a third of Earth's size larger, with the same amount of gravity. The atmosphere is made up of seventy-eight percent nitrogen, twenty percent oxygen, and two percent of various chemical traces. Put into simpler words, the atmosphere is exactly the same as Earth's." Cortana finished. She saw the Chief's split second tense of surprise, remembering of how she had felt almost the same when she had read the statistics.

As soon as she finished with the information and after his pause of surprise, Master Chief quickly asked, "Is the planet inhabited? Are there any humans?" The Chief already suspected the answer shortly before Cortana answered him.

"I'm sorry Chief, all I could make use of for life forms was the thermal camera. None of the heat signatures matched the human profile. There were no Covenant signatures either." Cortana added quickly, not wanting to completely demoralize the Chief. "Well, unless you like crashing and burning in the back half of a frigate, I would suggest we get moving." Cortana said, quickly getting back into their usual routines of conversation.

The Chief gave an acknowledging nod to show that he had confirmed what she had said. He quickly pulled the data chip containing Cortana and stashed a handheld holographic projector. As he was about to leave the cryo room, he paused, turned around and grabbed the assault rifle he had left next to his cryo tube. "Don't want to forget our favorite toy now do we?" Cortana sarcastically stated as they exited the room for the final time.

As the Chief went to reset his mission clock, he noticed that his last one said that he had been asleep for three years, four months, twenty-two days, thirteen hours, and five minutes. Then, he reset it, setting it to zero seconds. At the same time, Cortana started a countdown timer in the bottom center of his visor. It read twenty-three minutes and fifty seconds. Without even needing to ask, Cortana said, "This is the amount of time we have left until the Dawn begins to enter the planet's stratosphere. I would suggest having a safer way to get the planet's surface by then. I'll mark anything useful and easily portable with a navigation marker."

As Master Chief quickly ventured through the ship, the first nav marker appeared on his screen, pointing to a small shining object on floor in front of him. When he picked it up, he found that it was the hilt of a fully charged energy sword. He attached it to his magnetic

holder on the side of his thigh.

By the time the Chief reached his destination, the O.D.S.T.s' drop room, he had gathered a rather substantial supply for what he would need to survive. Before he went to the last remaining intact drop pod, he triple checked his inventory. This all included an assault rifle with six extra magazines, a pistols with three more clips, a shotgun that contained a full load already plus thirty-six shells, a battle rifle with four reloads, a fully charged energy sword, a portable holographic projector, three canteens, a flint and steel, and ten MREs. He was ready. He quickly checked the countdown timer to see that they had exactly two minutes until they reached the stratosphere. He walked briskly over to the pod and began strapping himself in. The timer was down to thirty seconds when he was ready to go and the Dawn was using the last of her power to launch this last pod.

"Any last minute prayers before we go free-falling to our death?" Cortana said, the nervousness beginning to show in her voice.

"We'll be fine." Chief simply said, as the countdown timer hit five seconds. He did not have the time nor the energy to currently spend on staying uninjured; surviving would have to suffice for now.

"Well aren't you just the greatest boost of confidence? Hold onto your helmet!" Cortana exclaimed as the timer hit zero, and the drop pod began its long descent into the alien land, its occupants not knowing what to expect, for at the moment, they just wanted to survive.

As Twilight and Luna watched, the Forward Unto Dawn, which they had decided that that was probably its name, began to be enveloped in a coat of fire, signifying that it was entering the atmosphere. However, what they also noticed was that the metal object was getting closer to Ponyville as well.

"Luna, quickly! We have to warn everypony in Ponyville just in case this..thing lands anywhere near us!" Twilight shouted at Luna, who appeared to be in a daze. At least, she was until Twilight began to shake her back to her senses.

"I'm sorry Twilight, forgive me. I didn't think something like this would ever happen." Luna hung her head just like on Nightmare Night when she thought that nopony liked her and that they would only ever fear her.

"Well, it's good to have you back. Now I'll head out over the East side of Ponyville and you take-" Twilight was suddenly interrupted by Luna, who had put her hoof over Twilight's mouth to quiet her.

"Actually Twilight Sparkle, I think I have a better idea, one that would take a much shorter amount of time." Luna said with a small smile. Then she took in a deep breath, "CITIZENS OF PONYVILLE! WE ARE AWAKENING THEE BECAUSE OF AN EMERGENCY! NOW WE NEED THEE TO BRING THY FAMILY TO THE LIBRARY AND ALL WILL BE EXPLAINED!" Luna shouted using the royal voice. Almost immediately, the ponies were coming out of their doors with their families in tow.

Once Twilight's ears stopped ringing, she began to wonder how it was

logical that the ponies woke up immediately during the second royal voice but stayed asleep during the first one. She immediately stopped that thought process right there. She remembered how that had gone with Pinkie and she did not want a repeat of that. Surprisingly, Even the Apples were able to show up. Luna had somehow awoken everypony within a three mile radius.

As all of the ponies were gathering, a few of them noticed the ball of fire that was getting ever so closer. The local mathematician, Accurate Readings, predicted that it would take about five minutes to impact and that it would land and slide in the Everfree forest for about one-and-a-half miles. As all of the present ponies sighed in relief, there was a small boom that echoed across the valley, quickly followed by another. As they all looked up at it, they realized that the object had broken the sound barrier with a large explosion following right after.

This almost caused all of the ponies to panic, but the calm demeanor of Princess Luna and the six elements kept them from running around in mass panic.

"So Twilight, what is this thing? It doesn't look all that tough to me." Rainbow Dash said with a smirk. She just couldn't see how this thing ,that couldn't even fly properly no less, could be that much of a problem.

Applejack came up next, shaking her head at Rainbow, "It's not that it can't fly all that well sugarcube. The biggest problem is the size of that there varmint." Applejack however, was still relieved that it wasn't going to land anywhere near the Acres.

"Well, it certainly could have looked a lot nicer. It just looks so drab in metal shell." Rarity, the fashion freak, described her complaints without fail yet again.

Fluttershy, who had been hiding in the library ever since Luna had used the royal voice, peeked out from behind the door, "I certainly hope that it doesn't harm any of the animals in the forest, even the timber wolves. I mean, if that's alright." When she was answered with another sonic boom, she squeaked and ran back inside.

"Alright, looks like we have everypony here. Wait, does anypony know where Pinkie is?" Twilight asked, confused, since the excitable pink mare was almost never late.

She got her answer when she heard another small boom, but not from the ship. Rather from Sugarcube Corner to be exact. She jumped out of the way just in time, as the pink mare landed right where Twilight had been standing. "Hey guys! Sorry but I had to grab my welcome party kit for the newcomer! Although, I'll have to clear a large area for the party." Pinkie said with a frown. "Oh well! I'll worry about that later!"

"Uh, I hate to burst your bubble Pinkie," Applejack began, "but that thing ain't alive. It's just a big hunk of rock er metal."

"No silly! Of course it's alive!" Pinkie said, rolling her eyes. "My Pinkie sense said that someone we be coming to Equestria riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiight now!" As she finished, the ground shook as the Forward Unto Dawn impacted exactly where Accurate Readings said

it would.

3. Sleeping and Waking in the Dark

As the giant metal object crashed and skidded into the middle of the Everfree forest, Twilight and Luna yelled for all of the ponies present to brace themselves for the incoming shockwave. As the pegasi took to the air, the earth ponies and unicorns got as low to the ground as they could. All of them except for Pinkie, who was still standing, excited for the incoming earthquake. At the same time, she was expecting it to be as small as the one that occurred during the stampede that Applejack was able to stop. She didn't know for once how wrong she was. While her Pinkie sense told her that an earthquake was incoming, it did not tell her how big it would be.

When Pinkie was sent flying into the air, nopony was actually worried that she would get hurt; it was Pinkie Pie after all. Then, in the middle of each of their thoughts, something happened to all of the ponies present that had a horn, namely the unicorns and a single alicorn. They each got a splitting migraine, causing them to fall to their knees in pain. What then happened however, was something none of them would have expected. They heard a cool female voice speak within their mind.

"Mayday Mayday. This UNSC FFG-201 Forward Unto Dawn, requesting immediate evac. Survivors aboard. Prioritization code: Victor05-3-Sierra 117." the smooth voice said. The words each of them had heard in their minds halted once the rest of the object slowed to a stop in the middle of the Everfree forest.

"Twilight, Rarity, are you ok? You an' all o' the unicorns collapsed to the ground. It was lookin' a lot like you were all in pain." Applejack said as she came up to her fellow elements of Magic and Generosity, a look of worry written all over her face. "Mind tellin' us what caused it? Or do you know?"

Strangely, for the two of them, the headache faded at the same time as the voice. "Sorry AJ, I honestly have no idea what that possibly could have been. Although, it seemed to have come from the object." Twilight said, mind already beginning to analyze the voice and the words it had said. Could this possibly be a new life form? How did they speak the same language?

Her mind continued on this track as the rest of falling pieces from the object fell to the ground. The fire that encased them began fading as well. Well, except one appeared to be moving on its own and was still on fire. As Luna and the Elements watched, the burning piece changed course from going straight downwards, to an almost horizontal trajectory. Not only that, but it was also heading in the direction of Ponyville.

As the residents watched, the smaller object hurtled over the library at impossible speeds that impressed even Rainbow Dash. It also landed in the middle of the forest; about fifteen miles from the original object according to Cheerilee. This event only caused curiosity this time however. Nopony was all that worried since this object was hundreds of times smaller than the original object, but how had it changed direction as if it had a mind of its own?

As Twilight and Luna discussed what to do, Rainbow Dash got herself ready to follow the small object. Twilight turned and stopped her just in time with her magic, "Rainbow, you can't go out there tonight. Luna and I have decided to go on an expedition find what this could be. She's going to go and tell Celestia what we're going to do and see if she'll come with us. Whatever it was you were planning on doing tonight, it will be a lot safer to do in the morning." Twilight concluded her plan to everypony. When she saw nods of agreement, she let go of Rainbow Dash. "We'll rest tonight and gather resources. In the morning we'll head out in the direction of the smaller object, see if we can't discover what it was. Then we'll go to Zecora's hut and see if she'll accompany us to the larger one and see if it's dangerous or not."

Twilight looked around the group and asked if any of them would be willing to accompany the elements and the princesses. When nopony raised their hoof, Twilight couldn't blame them. They would just have to go with a small group of guards to travel fast.

"Okay everypony! See all of you in the morning!" Twilight said as she went back inside the library, closing the door behind her.

"Hey Twilight, what was that big thing that fell into the forest?" Spike asked, having been awoken from the sonic boom.

"I don't know Spike, but I'll know more when we find it tomorrow." Twilight stated as she got a pair of saddlebags out of the chest at her bed. "I need your help though. Could you find me the books of translations, first contact scenarios, and the teleportation scrolls? I may need to get everypony out of there in a hurry and it'll help to have those preset teleportation spells ready."

Spike hastened his pace to get all of these things put together, not once questioning the first contact scenarios book. It was Twilight after all, and what she did was almost only her business.

Once they got everything she would need put together, Twilight took the yet again tired baby dragon up to bed with her. "Night Spike. I'll be gone when you wake up in the morning, so don't forget where the food is." Twilight said as she placed him into the small bed next to hers. When he replied with only a small grunt, she smiled to herself and climbed into her own bed, preparing herself for what was to come the next day.

Thirty minutes earlier

"Hold onto your helmet!" Cortana yelled, as the pod was ejected from the Forward Unto Dawn with a bone-rattling jerk as it was shot out into open air. "Well Chief? What are we going to do now?" Cortana asked quizzically as they free-fell through the air.

"Once we land, gather resources and set a home base point. We'll go from there." Master Chief finished quickly as they hit a bit of turbulence that would have made him bite his tongue off. As he watched out the small window, he saw what looked like a Middle-Aged city perched on the side of a mountain. Suddenly, the pod jerked sideways, changing course from the plains the he had originally planned on landing in towards a thick forest. But then, the pod rotated just in time for Master Chief to see a small village with a large group gathered around a tree through the flames in front of the

protective glass. He only caught a glimpse of the village as rocketed towards the foreboding forest and then only time to think, "Good, there's civilization." As soon as the thought finished, he crashed into the ground, uprooting a few trees in his way. He was unconscious immediately.

"Ugh." Chief groaned as he picked himself up off of the ground. As he stood up, he looked around. All he could see were trees, vegetation, and the trail he had left coming down. He looked up and found that the foliage was so thick that the sunlight could only get through and touch the ground in very few spots. "Cortana, have you been able to figure out where we are?" Chief asked his A.I. partner.

"No I haven't," Cortana began with a frown, "This planet hadn't been discovered by the UNSC when we had left. We'll just have to presume that we happened to run into it." As Chief looked around some more, he and Cortana both began to realize that something seemed off. Chief was the first to notice what it was.

"Cortana, the colors of the trees, they're wrong." Chief said with surprise, but masking it with his usual seriousness. "Shouldn't they be many different hues of color? They each seem to be just one color and no shading." Cortana was about to reply when they heard the snap of a twig. "What was that?" Chief asked, bringing his assault rifle to bear.

"Unknown, but whatever it is, it's not alone." Cortana replied as figure on four legs stepped out of the bushes and snarled at Master Chief. "It looks to be some type of wolf native to this area." Cortana said as five more of the wolves emerged from the thick forest and slowly began to surround the Chief, making a total of six. He couldn't see the wolves as well as he had hoped, since one jumped forward to attack what it thought would be easy prey.

"Hah!" Chief yelled out and dodged to the side, bringing his hand down in a fist on the back of the creatures neck, snapping it. "That's odd, something felt different when its neck broke." Chief thought as he whirled and put his hands up in time to keep the second wolves jaw from biting his helmet. He promptly tore off its bottom jaw and pulled out his pistol, shooting the next two in the head, killing them instantly. The Chief pulled the fifth one to him, pulled his combat knife out of its sheath, and drove into the chest of the beast. He turned one hundred eighty degrees and aimed his assault rifle at the last one. The wolf backed away and ran back into the forest after it saw what had happened to its pack mates. All of this happened in six point seven eight seconds according to Cortana's timer.

Now that the battle was over, Chief bent over to examine one of the bodies. "What? That can't be right!" exclaimed Cortana.

"What's wrong?" Chief asked quizzically, wondering what could possibly make Cortana react so strongly. He felt the cool presence in his mind swirl with thought, then a small jolt, not unlike a static shock, in his mind as his visor flashed red. "I'll ask her about it later when we have a safe place to stay." he thought.

When Cortana finally answered him, he could hear her trying to get a hold of herself. "Chief, these wolves, they're made completely out of wood. There are no flesh organs in the entire body."

4. Hunting Intruders

Twilight was running through a forest, the Everfree Forest to be exact. She hadn't gotten a good look at what was chasing her. All she knew though, was that she had to put as much distance between it and her. The tree to her right about ten feet disappeared in an explosion of flames. She couldn't tell what color because she was running so fast. If she could just get back to Ponyville and her friends, she might just stand a chance.

Wait a second, hadn't she seen that tree before? Was she going in circles? She slowed to a trot, eventually down to just walking. She couldn't hear the thing anymore. Was it gone? She looked around, not seeing a thing. Wait a second, was that Applejack and Rainbow Dash calling for her? She started to run towards their voices, sure it was them. What was that smell? She stopped again. She squinted into the darkness, trying to place the smell emanating from directly in front of her. That's when it hit her. Besides, it was kind of hard to forget the smell that she had realized was associated with the green glow that began emanating in a small green ball in front of her. Suddenly, the ball shot forward in a line of green death.

"AAAAAGGGGGHHHHH!" Twilight shot out of bed, soaked in sweat. What was that about? She hadn't had nightmares for years, so where had this come from? She shook her head, trying to shake her thoughts clear of the nightmare; she didn't have time for this. There was an adventure to be had!

She gathered up the saddlebags that Spike had graciously helped her pack the previous night. She quintuple checked that she had everything in her bag and even then she wasn't sure. Oh well, if her first plan went wrong, she had all the way up to Plan W.

When she walked outside, she found six guards, the two princesses, and her six faithful friends all waiting outside, and it looked like they had been waiting for awhile. "How long have you guys been out here?!" Twilight practically screamed, worried that she may have been asleep for hours.

"Hold on there, sugarcube. We ain't even been out here fer two hours!" Applejack comforted Twilight quickly, knowing that if she didn't that the safety of Ponyville would be at risk. "We heard ya scream a couple o' minutes ago though. Anythin' you want to tell us?" Applejack chided, worried about her friend's sanity.

"Don't worry AJ, just a bad dream. Alright everypony, shall we get started?" Twilight asked, not wanting to think about her nightmare the previous night.

The other ponies shared a look and sighed, knowing they would get nothing out of her. "Ok Twilight, you got the best view of the direction that the smaller object flew in. Lead the way." Celestia stated coming in behind her loyal student.

"Princess, are you sure you want me to lead? I mean, what if I take us in the wrong direction? Or lead us into a pack of Timberwolves?" Twilight's breathing was quickly escalating, "What about Ursas? The

guards wouldn't be able to do a-" Celestia quickly stuffed her hoof into Twilight's mouth, forcing her to be quiet.

"It's okay, Twilight. Don't worry, I believe in you, and so do your friends and my sister. If I believe you can lead, then you can. Consider it a test, if you will." Twilight's eyes suddenly widened and she calmed down. She would ace this test no matter what is what her eyes were saying. This is what told Celestia that she had said the right thing.

"Okay everypony, follow me!" Yelled Twilight as she ran off into the woods, hoping to get to the object before nightfall. When she was about ten feet in, looked behind her and found that all of the other ponies were following close behind.

After many hours of alternating between trotting and sprinting, Twilight decided to call for a break and consulted with Celestia. "Princess, I'm sure we should've found that smaller object by now. There's no way it was so far into the forest!" Twilight suddenly gasped, "Princess! I'm so sorry! I failed your test!" Twilight through herself to the ground before Celestia.

Celestia simply chuckled, "It is alright Twilight, you have not failed." The lavender mare looked up at her with hope. "When the larger object landed in the forest with such force, it disrupted the natural magic of the forest, making it impossible keep one's way. It will take at least another day for the magic to correct itself." She then leaned down to the young unicorn and whispered, "I would suggest looking around for a little longer to find shelter for the night. Luna will have to raise the moon in about an hour."

Twilight stoop up with a smile on her face, "Okay everypony! Break's over! Let's look around for a little bit and see if we can't find some shelter!" As she said this, all of the other ponies groaned and stood except for Pinkie Pie.

In fact, she rather jumped and yelled, "GUYS!" As everypony stopped and looked at her, she simply stood there and pointed in a direction, "We'll find shelter that way. My Pinkie Sense told me!" And with that, she started hopping in the direction she had pointed. No pony had the energy nor sense to argue with her.

What they found after thirty minutes of walking however, shocked them all. It was a large purple structure that as though it had crashed into the ground rather than built there. It was about the size of a house in Ponyville and had five prongs sticking off of the top. However, it was not the object that they were currently looking for. This object had obviously been here for years. After ten minutes of discussion, they decided that they had no better place to stay.

After Luna had raised the moon, the leader of the present guards started a fire and explored the inside of the purple structure. On closer examination, it revealed hundreds of thousands of small hexagons that covered the entire structure. When he ventured inside, he came running back out after five minutes. "Princess Celestia! I found something inside of the building! On the floor, there was what looked like a set of armor, although whatever was in it, which died by my guess, has long since disintegrated with the passage of time. It was much too large to be a pony too."

After he finished his long explanation of whatever was inside the ponies all stood still, lost in thought. However, before they could think too much, the ground trembled a little bit. "Hey guys, have any idea what that possibly could have been?" Rainbow Dash asked a little nervous as to what could cause the ground to actually shake.

"All of the debris from the larger object has already fallen to the ground. Whatever it was, it's nearby and it's getting closer," said Luna as the trembling grew in size and the bursts were more frequent. "Guards, douse the fire! It's leading this thing straight to us!" She exclaimed as a couple of the guards poured water onto the fire.

As they waited, the trembling grew even larger until it just stopped. Suddenly, Twilight's nose twitched as she scented a familiar smell. While she was trying to place it, a small translucent green ball materialized out of the darkness about fifteen feet away from them. Then, right as Twilight remembered where she had smelt this before, she heard Fluttershy scream the loudest she had ever been heard as the ball shot forward towards Twilight in a line of green death.

After the Timberwolf fight the night before

"What do you mean it's made of wood? That just doesn't seem physically possible." Chief said as bent down to examine one of the corpses. He wedged his fingers into the ribcage of the wooden wolf. When he pulled it apart, he saw that she was, in fact, correct. Different sizes of sticks and twigs had fused together, forming what appeared to be respiratory and digestive systems. Suddenly, his visor filled with red.

"Why are you asking me this?! I simply said that it was made of wood! I have no idea how it could even be possible! Next time I tell you something, use your brain before you ask me a senseless, QUESTION!" As shouted the last word, there was an power surge in the Chief's armor, depleting his shields. Although they did recharge, he was still worried. Cortana had a sharp intake of breath, "Chief! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to. It's just, when you asked that question, my exasperation just went straight to rage for whatever reason." John pulled out the projector, and Cortana appeared on it.

"Cortana, what is wrong?"

"John, I'm fine, it was just the crash, I'll be fine now." She knew he would not believe her, but she still gave herself points for trying.

"Cortana, something was wrong before," Chief said, recalling how she had flashed red when she had been waking him up. "Tell me what is wrong," He continued, focusing all his attention to her.

Cortana sighed, knowing the time to tell him had come. "Chief, you know how A.I.s begin to deteriorate after seven years right?" When he nodded, she continued, "Chief, I'm seven and a half years old." Chief looked at her in surprise and suddenly made a decision.

"Halsey, she'll know how to fix this." Chief knew it was a long shot, but he would do anything to keep Cortana safe. "If we can find that town or castle, we might be able to get into contact with the UNSC.

We could back to Earth and Halsey."

Cortana looked at him for a few moments and sighed, "Don't make a girl a promise, you know you can't keep."

With the conversation now out of the way, Chief put the projector away and checked on all of his supplies. Satisfied that all of his equipment was still there, he began to clear the area closest to the pod. At some point before he started, he checked the horizon through a small opening in the leaves; the sun was just coming up.

Clearing out the area took much longer than he had originally thought it would. It was as though the trees had a mind of their own. When he looked up into the sky through the same small patch, he found that it was now past noon; probably about two o'clock. "John, you need to rest. I'll wake you if anything too dangerous comes near," Cortana said with a smile in her voice as the Chief began to head towards one of the forking in the branches in a nearby tree.

"Cortana, if we go uninterrupted while I rest, wake me in four hours." Chief said as he settled into the fork, propping his assault rifle into the crook of his elbow and against his shoulder. He closed his eyes and had one of his shortest dreams yet.

He was walking through the same forest that his physical body was currently sleeping in. It was nighttime. Suddenly, he heard short, gasping breaths as somebody or something drew closer to his position. He melted into the shadows just in time as a lavender unicorn that was obviously female from the pitch of her breaths, ran right past him. Since he knew it was a dream, he didn't question the unicorn fact; he had seen far stranger things. On her haunch, he glimpsed a picture of what appeared to be a six-pointed star.

It was apparent she was running from something. He followed silently for a few seconds, when she suddenly stopped. Wait, could he hear voices in the distance? One sounded a little tomboyish while the other was a southern accent. The mare perked up at the sound of these voices, and started to walk forward when she stopped again, sniffing the air. Had she smelled him? As this thought crossed his mind, a small green ball materialized in front of her. Why did it seem so familiar? Suddenly, it shot forward in a green line of death towards her. It was about to hit when suddenly-

"JOHN!" Chief's eyes snapped open as Cortana called him. From the coloration of the night sky, it was around seven. "Oh thank goodness, I've been trying to wake you up for an hour!" Cortana exclaimed as he slipped down from the tree. "About thirty minutes ago, I picked up the heat signature of a controlled fire about two hundred meters away."

"Possible civilization?" Chief asked, grabbing only his assault rifle, pistol, and a grenade.

"It's quite possible. I'll switch your visor so it's easier to see where to go," Cortana said as she switched his visor to thermal. What appeared to be a campfire was clearly apparent on the screen now. He started heading towards it when the ground suddenly shook. It wasn't the type from falling debris, but of the footsteps of something big, very big.

"Cortana, what was that?" The Chief quickened his pace towards the fire, which now had fourteen red blobs sitting around it. Two of the blobs appeared to be larger than the rest. Then, one of the smaller blobs threw something onto the fire, extinguishing it. They had felt the shaking as well apparently. Luckily, Chief could still follow their heat signatures. As he got closer, he activated the night-vision just in time to hear a loud scream, higher pitched than any he had heard before.

"Chief! You need to help them! They're being attacked by a hunter!" Cortana yelled as John looked around a tree just in time to see an all-too-familiar green ball rush forward towards the lavender unicorn from his dream in a line of green death.

As the line got closer to her faithful student, time seemed to slow for Celestia. When the line was just mere inches away, one of the guards shoved Twilight out of the way and into cover, taking the hit himself. From the resulting explosion, Celestia got a good view of what had attacked them. It was standing up tall on its hind feet, at least fourteen feet tall. It was covered in thick armor on every part of its body. On its back, were six undoubtedly razor-sharp spines. On its left foreleg was a shield as big as herself while on the other one was a contraption that now glowed the same green as the explosion.

There was nothing left of the guard's body in the crater. Celestia looked over to her student who was in shock. That could've been her if not for the fast reflexes of the guard. In their hiding spot next to the purple structure, the beast could not see them.

"Majesty, when we caught that glimpse of the creature, I saw that on its back there was an unarmored section. I will run out as a decoy. When it turns to me, give it everything you've got, but don't stay here, get as far away as possible," said one of the guard ponies,. Celestia looked to him and saw that he knew full well what kind of sacrifice he was making. Celestia nodded and the guard bolted out as she readied her horn. As the beast turned towards the running pony, something unexpected happened.

Celestia heard a click then a thud as another creature that stood at least seven and a half feet jumped to the ground in front of them, holding a small ball in his right hand, a tiny red light flashing on its surface. It began to run on its own hind feet towards the turned back of the larger creature, which was preparing another green ball aimed towards the decoy guard. As the smaller creature got close however, the larger turned and hit him full force with the shield, sending the smaller flying backwards next to the remaining ponies. As it got up again, it glanced at them and began running again towards the larger. Just as the larger fired another line though, the smaller jumped on its, throwing off its aim. It then jumped over the shoulder, landing planted on its back.

"Hey whoa! What is that thing doing on that bigger guy's back?!" Cried out Rainbow Dash, as mesmerized by what was happening as the rest of them. Suddenly, the smaller shoved something inside the bigger creature's unarmored lower back, then jumping off and rolling backwards twice, yet again landing next to them.

At first, nothing happened as the giant creature shook itself, making sure that the smaller was no longer on its back. When it stopped

shaking, another unexpected thing happened.

It exploded.

Fluttershy let out a muffled scream as the giant's life was ended. On the ground was a large worm about two feet long struggling. Celestia used her magic to pick it up and place it inside a container that they had brought with them for later study. Celestia turned towards the victorious creature, hoping it spoke the same language. "Now who, do we owe our thanks to?" For a few moments the creature was silent, but it then replied in a raspy male voice.

"Call me Master Chief."

5. The Hunter

It had been over a year since the hunter and his brother had crashed into this world and his brother was killed. The remaining of the two had decided to start calling itself Hunter, for the only other one that knew his identity was now gone; he had forgotten his name. So, he took the name the humans had given him. He was in a bad situation. The forerunner metal he had been eating was now gone, and he needed to find a new source.

After two nights of hunger, the worms in his right arm began to die; deactivating the fuel rod gun attached to his arm. When hope was seeming to be lost, a miracle happened. The ground shook as Hunter looked to the sky. Could it be? Was this a giant hunk of metal racing to the ground? A new source! With this, he could continue to feed until he grew too big for his armor. Then, he would split, having the extra worms fill the armor that used to belong to his brother.

He waited a full day before setting out to this new source of food that had come down. As he left, night began to fall upon this forest that he now called home. He was well into the trees when suddenly, something was wrong. There was a heat behind him that should not be there. He turned and began walking back to his home area. The ground shook with each step he took.

He came within view of his home and found, intruders. There were fourteen total. They had obviously sensed he was close, as one of the ones wearing armor, nothing compared to his own, dumped water on the fire from a nearby stream. It did not matter anyways, he could still see them. As the rage began to spread from one worm to the next, the worms in his right arm came alive again with renewed strength. How DARE they defile the final resting place of his brother?! They would not make it past the night! He raised his arm and started charging the fuel rod gun.

One of creatures, a light-yellow winged one, let out a scream as he fired. He had targeted the closest one to him, a lavender horned creature. When it was about to hit, one of the armored intruders pushed it out of the way and took the hit itself. It did not matter, he would kill them all in his blind rage!

Suddenly, one of the armored ones dashed out of hiding. Good, an easy target. He began charging the gun again, aiming at the guard when sensed something else. He turned, flinging his shield out and accidentally hitting a human in the face, sending him flying. Hunter

decided to apologize later. He turned around preparing to fire again when a weight pulled down on his shield, throwing off his aim and missing. He looked and saw it was the human again. Didn't he realize it had been an accident?

Suddenly, the human jumped over his shoulder and onto Hunter's back. What in the world was he doing? Then the human pushed an object into Hunter between a few of the worms in his back, jumping off immediately. He shook himself like a dog to make sure the human was off. His rage having faded, he suddenly had sense of finality. He would get to see his brother again, of this he was certain.

When he saw his brother again, he would be very gla-

Who am I? Hunter. Ah yes, that was my title. These thoughts went sluggishly through the one worm's mind as the biggest intruder lifted him up with telekinesis it seemed, and placed him into a small container. All it knew now, was to feed, split into a second, and begin a colony. As it nibbled on a piece of metal that had been placed into the cylinder with it, the vibrations of voices sank into him. The one voice he could make out, he decided would be his new parent figure. The only words he understood from this voice was, "Master Chief."

6. First Impressions

As the guardspony ran out of the cover of the small overhang, everything seemed to slow down for a few seconds. He ran past the crater where his close friend Self Sacrifice had been utterly destroyed. He ignored the fact that he would probably look like that in a few seconds.

He dove through the line of trees at the edge of the clearing and continued to run. He felt the heat of one of the green balls charge past him by five feet; a narrow miss. What had caused it to miss though? Had the Princess begun her attack on the creature? He was sure that she had perhaps been able to at least escape.

It was then that he heard a muffled thump, completely different from the large creature's strange weapon. He completely turned around and saw that he was no longer in sight of the clearing. "Oh no!" He began running towards the line in the trees and burst through to see that there was orange blood and gore covering almost every inch of the trees in area.

As he finished his observation, he was overcome with shock. Whatever had done this, could it have done it to the Princesses? He quickly found the being responsible for the death of the giant. It was standing close to the Princesses and getting closer. He would not allow it to hurt them! He grabbed a nearby spear from his fallen friend. The beast hadn't noticed him yet; he still had the element of surprise. He leveled the spear and charged.

"Call me Master Chief," the Chief said. He needed another person he could trust, and it was looking like these ponies were going to be the only ones he could trust after Cortana. He was about to walk forward to examine the rest of the group that was currently hiding from him, when suddenly there was a moving white blip rushing towards his six.

He turned just in time to catch a spearhead with the side of his arm instead of his back. The metal head and wooden shaft shattered. He easily slid around to the side and threw a quick jab to the pony's side, denting the armor and fracturing the rib. He didn't want to hurt the pony too bad, just in case came back and bit him later.

"No!" a female voice cried out. Suddenly, a second blip rushed at him at speeds that surpassed even Kelly. He braced himself just in time thanks to the augmentations Halsey gave him. By the time the object hit him, it had all the effect of a tennis ball being thrown against a brick wall. He looked to see who had flown into him. He saw that it was a cyan pegasus mare with a mane and tail of rainbow colors. She was unconscious with a lump swelling up on her forehead. She would have a heavy concussion just from running into him headfirst.

"Chief look out!" Cortana shouted as the original pony in armor charged at him again, but this time with a new friend. It was yet again another mare, but this one was orange with a blonde mane and tail. Just before they got to him, they stopped, turned around, and were preparing to double buck him when Cortana suddenly yelled out, "Chief, mild power building! It's coming from the white of the two normal sized horses!" Just as Chief brought his arms to bear to guard from the attack, a gold aura enveloped his entire body and the two charging ponies.

"ENOUGH!" Yelled the same pony whom Cortana had just identified was charging power. She levitated all of them, including the injured mare to the ground in front of her. She set the mare down on the ground in front of her. "We came here guard, to investigate the area of effect where the larger object landed, and to also possibly make peaceful meetings with any alien life forms!"

The guard visibly paled and hung his head in shame. "I am sorry milady, I have failed you." As she released him from the field of magic, he walked over to where the Chief was still being held. "I am sorry creature. I was overzealous and thought you were attacking my Princess. I hope you will forgive me." Just like the others, he did not expect the creature to know perfect Equestrian, so you would have to understand his surprise when Chief replied.

"You should get that cracked rib checked." The Chief knew the feeling of panic that the guard had no doubt felt. "It's fine. I know how you felt." The orange mare looked at him in surprise as she was lowered next.

"Applejack, I understand why you charged out to defend Rainbow Dash, but next time, give me a little more time to get things under control." The white alicorn, which Cortana had told Chief she was when she had been talking to the guard, said.

"Ah understand Princess. I'll give ya'll enough time next time we meet a weird alien thing-a-majig." The mare walked over to her friends, who were gathered around Rainbow Dash. John now had a good view of the rest of the group. It included two alicorns; a white one with a rainbow mane and tail and a smaller light blue one with a night-like tail and mane, six guards, and six ponies that looked more like civilians.

John wasn't too worried about these ponies, except for one; the pink one. She just sat there and looked at him with a smile before going to her fallen friend.

"Ok then 'Master Chief', I'm going to put you down. Do not try anything. My name is Princess Celestia." The glow around the white alicorn's horn vanished as did the aura around Chief, releasing him from the golden prison. "First of all, what is the name of your species?"

Since she appeared to be genuinely curious, Chief went ahead and told her. "My specie's name is human." As soon as he finished this though, Celestia's eyes opened wide in rage and her horn began to glow a more brilliant gold than before.

"Chief! There's an energy signature building around her horn again, and it's much stronger than before! She's going to send a blast of energy at you!" Cortana was now incredibly worried. She hadn't seen an energy source like this before. It could pick up objects and shoot beams but it seemed as though it came naturally to the unicorns and alicorns.

"Cortana, remember the training course with the anti-scorpion missile? Can you track how fast the beam shoots so that I can deflect it?" Of course Cortana would never forget the test she and John had first passed together. However, this would be harder since she had no idea how fast these bolts of energy could move, and the amount of energy the alicorn's horn was emitting was incredible; easily the same amount of destructive power of an anti-tank missile! This was not a creature you would want as an enemy.

The light of the horn was now blindingly bright. The Chief noted that the lavender unicorn had noticed what Celestia was doing and was trying to stop her. Suddenly, a beam of pure light shot forward from her horn straight towards Master Chief. Time slowed down for him, so he almost didn't need Cortana's help deflecting, almost.

As he brought his right hand across his chest, the shields on the palm of his hand hardened. His palm connected with the bolt of light, the two different energies fighting each other for a fraction of a second before his shields won. The bolt shot off into the forest, going a good fifty feet before creating an explosion that left a crater twenty feet in diameter. The civilians stared at their Princess and the crater in shock; they had never seen their leader so mad.

Since the Chief was distracted for half a second, he was quickly enveloped by the golden glow again. "You humans! I told you to stay away from this planet thousands of years ago! But you never listen! You come down in your big ships and constantly try to push us out! In fact, it's been so long since I last saw a human that I had forgotten what you all looked like!" She was fuming, almost literally. "Now, I am going to cast spell that will allow us into your mind, so we may see what your leaders were thinking, sending you here alone." And so, she proceeded to unlock and take off his helmet.

Twilight was in shock. All of this had happened so fast. The large creature defeated by an explosion from within, the Master Chief then knocking Rainbow out without even trying, making the Princess so mad that she had used over half of her power to create an explosive piece

of magic only to have it deflected by the bipedal human, and now, she was going to see the memories of this creature.

Celestia pulled the helmet off of the human, revealing his face. It was odd, the creature definitely had a face, but it was like her mind couldn't put the face into perspective. She couldn't even describe what it looked like.

Celestia walked up to the creature, horn aglow and was about to touch it to his forehead, when the Master Chief spoke. "Be careful, you may not like what find inside of my memories." Celestia hesitated for a moment before proceeding to touch the horn to his head.

Suddenly, as a darkness began to overtake Twilight's mind, she heard a feminine voice, the same as earlier surprisingly, yell out, "Chief!" Then the darkness completely overtook her.

7. My Little Halo Origins: Master Chief

Twilight was lying on a rather hot and hard type of ground, which was rather uncomfortable. As each of her senses came to her, sight last, she noticed different things. Taste; the air had an odd flavor to it, much like Sweet Apple Acres in the summer, but with a new scent she couldn't identify. Smell; there was the disgusting scent of burnt rubber, but was then overrun by the smell of grass and vegetation. Touch; as earlier, she was still lying on the uncomfortable ground. Hearing; at first, it was just a ring, then as that faded, she heard a peculiar sound; children playing. Sight; she snapped her eyes wide open, immediately regretting it because of the bright light of a sun.

As her eyes finally adjusted, she inspected her surroundings. She was standing atop an odd, flat, black, slab that was made up of many small rocks. To her right were some building with the number 119 on the side of the wall. As she was looking around, she spotted her friends, mentor, and the human, who was yet again in full body armor, making it impossible to read his expression.

"Princess Celestia! What's going on? Where are we?" Twilight yelled out to her mentor.

"Do not worry, my student. This is only part of the spell I cast on the human. We are viewing his memories when things actually start to get interesting; I decided to start at this point in his life, which is where it seemed to have begun." Celestia turned away from her student and continued talking, "Well then, let us continue with this memory shall we?"

They all looked to the Chief who should know his way around, but was instead standing there looking at a couple sitting at a table. The woman wore a broad hat and sundress and was checking her appearance in a small handheld mirror, which was turned towards he children playing a game of king of the hill. The man wore loose pants and a shirt and was standing ramrod straight; he looked incredibly uncomfortable and was talking to the woman. As the group neared, they could hear their conversation.

"Is that him?" The male whispered.

The woman looked up, towards the group of children playing on the hill. It was a rough game, with at least a dozen boys rough housing with each other. Twilight was rather shocked at how the boys fought and enjoyed it. She looked to her mentor, seeing the disapproval in her eyes.

The woman suddenly remarked, "King of the Hill." It was obviously what the human boys were playing. One boy, however, was taller than the rest by a head. He also had a small gap in between his front teeth. "That's our boy."

The man in the couple, who at this point they assumed was the Master Chief, began to speak, "He seems, um, very animated." Yet again, the two adults were proven true as the group looked over to the group of boys again.

The large boy was laughing as he tossed one of his class mates over his soldier. Suddenly, three boys ganged up on him; two grabbed his legs while the other wrapped his arms around the boys chest. The bundle of boys rolled down the hill, with the big one kicking and biting all the way. He broke away from the other boys, ran up the hill, pushed another boy off, and announced that he was now king.

"Yes," the woman said, "We may be able to use this one." The ponies had no idea what she was talking about, but the metal giant standing next to them seemed to have a pretty good idea of what was happening. Nopony bothered to ask since they somehow knew he would just stay silent. "Stay here and watch me, Lieutenant," she said, passing him the small rectangle that she had been holding, "I'm going to have a closer look."

The man was about to say something but the woman was already walking away. The man had a scowl on his face the group followed the woman. She halted about four meters from the base of the hill.

"You're in trouble," said one of the boys to the big one, pushing him forward. The boy pushed back and then turned to the woman, a defiant look in his eyes. He stood tall, while his friends and classmates backed away with embarrassed smirks on their faces.

"Can I speak with you please?" said the woman, still staring into the boy's eyes. He finally broke contact and trotted down the hill, ignoring the taunts from the others. She led him a little ways away from the hill and turned to him. "What's your name?" she asked.

"I'm John," said the young boy as he stuck out his right foreleg. It appeared to be a symbol of greeting, yet the woman still had a surprised look on her face. Then, she smiled and shook his hand.

"It's very nice to meet you," she said, getting down onto one of her joints on her back leg. "I wanted to ask you what you were doing?"

"Winning," he said.

While the other boys had backed away from her, scared that she would punish them, this one had stayed, obviously unafraid of what this older human could do to him. "You like games," she smiled, "so do

I."

John sighed, "Yeah, but they made me play chess last week. That got boring. It's too easy to win."

Twilight was now both surprised and confused. How could these two different species that had never met before have the same strategic game? She looked to her mentor, seeking to ask her this but Celestia simply nodded her head back to the memory, so Twilight continued to watch as the boy spoke again.

"Or, can we play gravball? They don't let me play gravball anymore, but maybe if you tell them it's okay?" His pouting mood was quickly replaced with curiosity as the woman reached into her handbag.

"I have a different game I want you to try." She pulled out a small metal circle about a millimeter thick and held it up in front of the young boy's eyes. "Look. People used coins like this for currency a long time ago, when Earth was the only planet we lived on."

Poor Twilight was beginning to go into shock. How could these humans be so incredibly advanced? From what she had seen, they didn't use any obvious types of magic, yet they were still able to travel between stars! She decided to try and calm down and watch through the rest of the memory.

John looked at the small object in her fingers and reached out to grab it. The woman pulled it just out of reach of his little hands. "Each side is different. Do you see? One has the face of a man with long hair. The other side has a bird, called an eagle, and it's holding-

At this point, John must have gotten impatient and finished the sentence for her, "Arrows." The woman got a look in her eyes that Twilight often had when she was analyzing an object.

"Yes, good. We'll use this coin in our game. If you win, you can keep it." John hesitantly tore his gaze away from the coin, and looked to her.

"Okay, I always win though. That's why they don't let me play gravball anymore." This young human seemed plenty arrogant enough and seemed to think he would always win.

"I'm sure you do."

"What's the game?"

"It's very simple. I toss the coin like this." She flicked her wrist, snapped her thumb, and the coin arced, spinning into the air, and landed in the sand. "Next time, though, before it lands, I want you to tell me if it will fall with the face of the man showing or with the eagle holding the arrows."

"Got it." John tensed, bent his knees, and then his eyes seemed to lose focus on her and the coin.

The woman picked up the quarter. "Ready?"

When the boy gave a slight nod, she tossed it into the air, making

sure to get as much spin as possible into it. His eyes watched with that unfocused look in his eyes. It went up, and then down. Then his hand suddenly shot out and caught the coin in the air, yelling out "Eagle!" as he caught it.

Sure enough, when the woman pried open his hand, the eagle lay face up, glinting in the afternoon light. John pull his hand back, a look of suspiciousness on his face, "I get to keep it, right? That's what you said."

The woman smiled and said, "Yes, you can keep it, John."

Suddenly, everything in the picture froze and began to dissolve as the memory ended. Celestia stepped forward and spoke to the entire group. "I am sorry that took so long, since it appeared to wield nothing too special, but I needed to pinpoint who he will be throughout each of these memories. He was the young boy who was bigger than the rest, wasn't he?" she said, turning to the Master Chief.

When he merely nodded in response, Celestia turned to the rest of the group. "Now that we know who we're watching, the rest of it will go quite quickly. These memories will appear in flashes, but we will know everything that's happening behind them." And so, the rest of the memories came flooding in, in flashes of images.

As the group stood there, they watched a group of about seventy-five children, John included, being led into a very large auditorium, the same woman as from the previous memory standing on the stage at the front of the room. "You will become the best we can make of you." These children had been kidnapped and inducted into a military experiment to crush human rebellion before it overthrew the government and chaos would ensue. How was this fair? They had no right to kidnap these children! Twilight began to feel anger build up but pushed it down; there would be more to come.

John began his run along a gravel path, over a bridge and past some cinderblock structures. He was with the other children and they were all exhausted, but they were given no rest stops until they came to a courtyard with a flag on a pole in the center. A woman that seemed both real and fake, young and old, was walking down the steps. "My name is Dã@jÃ and I will be your teacher. Please come in; class is about to start." Twilight was still mad about the treatment of the children, but was curious as to what this woman would be teaching them.

The memory flashed forward, showing the children sitting in a dark room around a holographic landscape. Upon further investigation, the hologram sported a small battlefield. The woman explained about warriors called Spartans. They were the elite, and could never be beaten.

Now, the group stood in a room about the size of a hoofball field. There was a small skirmish going at a bunker in the center of the room. John was now much older, at least fourteen now, and much stronger too now, as he ripped a metal contraption off of the arm of a mech suit. The chemical augmentations they had gone through had obviously been successful; their bones were nearly indestructible, they could practically see in the dark, they could run three times faster than any other human being, their strength was now ten times

that of before, and they were now almost three meters tall.

The memory flashed again, leaving them in a an even bigger space; easily able to hold a city. Suddenly, large metal doors on the side of the room exploded, forming a hold into outer space. They spotted the group running into a drop ship with a large metal box. The rear door closed and they flew off.

John was in another underground cavern, however this time, he was being suited with a set of armor similar to that of what he was wearing now. When it was on, he went through a large obstacle course, treading through barbed wire like it was wet paper and punching holes in concrete dummies.

There were now three of the humans, one of them John, and the other two his friends and comrades. One of them had a giant hole in his armor. "You've got to leave me.," said the one with hole softly to the other two. They were standing in a purple room, not unlike that of the structure they had been staying in the previous night.

John and the female Spartan were now floating through space as they watched the ship explode into a ball of blue flames, taking the other Spartan with it. This was the beginning of the Human-Covenant war, and the humans would fight with everything they had, just to survive.

Suddenly, they were on a completely different planet than the ones from before. There was smoke in the distance and giant purple vessels that were two kilometers long flying through the skies. Human civilians, at least half the size of the Spartan, were running through crowded streets in mass panic. The vessels in the sky however, began to ascend to greater heights. The humans paused in confusion; were the Covenant running away? They were soon answered by bright blue orb of light, so high in the atmosphere that it had to be in orbit. Just the light shot down, the group zoomed out into space next to a pelican that was holding the Master Chief. They had each felt the heat of that beam and knew it was plasma, which was coming from a ship at least nine times larger than those they had seen on the surface.

Fluttershy began to have a breakdown and burst into tears while the others stood there in shock. Who could do something like that? Commit genocide on an entire species? They looked to Master Chief with pity in their eyes. However, they did not know his entire part in this yet.

The years flashed by, showing almost nothing but scenes of combat. In each of these, they could see John and others in identical suits of armor fighting back against the Covenant; they were the one thing that could always beat the Covenant on the ground. They watched as he mercilessly slaughtered thousands of grunts, jackals, and elites. This was no normal human. In fact, this was what a human could become if you took the best and brightest and pumped them full of drugs and training to be the ultimate killing machine.

The speed of the memories slowed to normal speed as they him standing in a room speaking with an aging man who held a pipe in his hand. With a sudden revelation, the group realized that it was the man who had first observed John with the woman many years ago. Since it was so quick, they caught the man saying something about a "Cole

Protocol" which followed with John taking a small rectangle out of a podium to his right. It was odd, since there was a small woman who had no physical body, much like Dã©jã . She had multiple colors going between green and blue.

The next five days passed in less than five seconds. John landed on a strange ring shaped world, later discovering that they might be able to use it as a weapon against the Covenant. Then he was standing in a room, watching the feed from an abandoned helmet.

He dropped the helmet and shot upwards to a standing position, swinging his weapon around as he checked for enemies. What could have gotten him so alert and worried. There was the sound of bending metal as one of the doors on the side of room burst open, revealing small popcorn-like things; the Flood. As John fought through several waves of the tiny abominations, new horrors joined the fight. Bipedals that used to be humans and elites were now so disfigured they were a new species altogether. There were giant holes in their chest, claws made of bones sticking out of arms with unnatural degrees, and their heads hung at about waist level.

Celestia stumbled away from the rest of the group and vomited her supper onto the ground, with the others soon following suit, excluding Master Chief. How could he be so unaffected? He had experienced this first-hand. When they were all finished they turned back to look into what part of the memory they were at now.

Just a couple of images of a silver orb with a blue eye named 343 Guilty Spark speaking with John, then retrieving the index, John grabbing Cortana and defeating the sentinels, then flying away in a Longsword fighter with the Halo ring breaking into pieces as a miniature sun appeared on its surface.

Wanting the horrors to end, Celestia began to fast forward through the last few memories. John, Sergeant Johnson, and Miranda Keyes being awarded, the same trio following a giant Covenant ship through a portal, finding another Halo, and then Master Chief returning to Earth on a Forerunner ship.

The group flashed to the ground where John was speaking with Johnson, telling him he was ready to go. The rest was over quickly, going through the Spartan liberating Voi, destroying the Flood infested ship, following the same Forerunner ship through another portal, Miranda being shot in the back, a Halo rising out of the water, Cortana being retrieved out of the Flood hive, Johnson being lazered by Guilty Spark, the Halo being activated, and ending with John going into cryo in the back half of the Forward Unto Dawn.

The group watched with rapt attention, as Cortana woke John up, both of them then escaping from the ship, flying over Ponyville in the process. When they witnessed his fight with the Timberwolves, it only drove home how dangerous he was. The last scene was of him destroying the Hunter, defeating the rest in battle, Celestia's magic bolt, and leaving them standing in the white space between memories.

The ponies were in terrible shape. Fluttershy appeared to be in a coma. Rarity, Rainbow Dash, and Applejack all sat there in shock. Pinkie Pie was no longer; replaced by Pinkamena Diane Pie for now. Luna stood there watching the Master Chief with a mix of fear, pity, and anger in her eyes. And lastly, Twilight and Celestia were talking

about what to do with this dangerous creature.

After several minutes of talking, Celestia stepped towards John while Twilight used her magic to keep him from moving. "Master Chief, or John as is your name, I have decided that you are too dangerous to let live at all. I have spoken with my student and she agrees with me. Just be thankful that you will no longer have to suffer through any more battle. None of the other ponies made a move to stop her because they were still in shock. Celestia's horn began to glow a brilliant gold once more and Luna was about to object when the most unexpected thing happened; the magic around Celestia's horn flickered and a golden light ran like water out through her horn.

The white space flickered as well for a moment, but then went back to normal. The entire group including Master Chief were confused for a few seconds as Celestia's magic residue flowed towards a new figure approaching. When they were within sight, the group saw that it was Cortana, flickering between hues of red and blue; and she looked pissed.

"How dare you make assumptions! You may have seen his memories, but you were never able to read his thoughts!" Cortana grew to about twice her size as she absorbed Celestia's magic. She was only able to do so because they were technically still inside the Master Chief's mind. As she grew, a golden haze gathered around her right hand, quickly brightening. "You. Make. Me. SICK!" She screamed this as she rose her hand and shot forward, gripping Celestia's horn. Then, a familiar blackness took over everypony's mind, and they all sank into more memories.

Author's note:

I'll admit it. I hated writing this chapter. However, it needed to be done for those who only needed the quickish synopsis. If you want a much more detailed description of all these events, go to youtube or read the books. Anyways, I can't wait to get these memories out of the way. I have so much planned for this story but these memory chapters are an obstacle. Oh well, the next chapter will probably be shorter and easier to write. Until then, enjoy. :)

~We are the Meta

8. My Little Halo Origins: Celestia

John slowly cracked open his eyes. He saw them all floating above the same planet as the one they were all currently on in the outside world. However, something was different; there were what appeared to be battleships in orbit around the planet. These ships were unlike any he had ever seen. The entire fleet appeared to be made up of ships that flew in several pieces, attached to a single control sphere by lines of color.

As the ships moved, John looked to the center of the fleet, easily spotting the flagship. This ship was impressive in not only its size, but also of its armament. There were a total of twelve attachments connected by lines of golden light. Six were five-kilometer long needles with red runes running along their length while the other six were small metal plates about a half of a kilometer in diameter with blue runes etched into their surface.

As the group flew through space towards the flagship, its name became clear on the side of the central sphere; Celestial Radiance. They drifted through a few walls of the Celestial Radiance, coming to a halt in the command room in the center of the sphere. Surrounded by holographic screens was the command chair, and in that chair sat Princess Celestia herself.

John looked over to the purple unicorn, Twilight, as he had learned her name, was looking to the white alicorn with a look of confusion written all over her face. "B-but Princess Celestia, when did this take place? We've never had that kind of technology! Is this taking place in the future?!" The poor unicorn began to hyperventilate until the orange pony came over and calmed her down with a few words of comfort.

The whole group looked to Celestia with looks of confusion, all wanting answers. She sighed and hung her head, "I was not always as weak as I am now. This memory is what was occurring over one hundred thousand years ago. Continue watching to see what happened. Our meeting with John and my attempt to kill him was not only a mistake, but also not the first time we've made contact with humans." It was clear she would say no more for now, so they turned their attention back to the younger Princess.

She was an impressive figure, with a full metal combat skin covering every inch of fur except for her head. Her horn had a metal device strapped around its entire length with a golden glow running down the wire from the contraption to the hull of the ship. 'Her magic is what controlled the entire flag ship!' John realized with a sudden revelation.

"Ma'am! The 'Fire of Magic' has just returned from patrol and has reports of Forerunner ships nearing the battle group through slip space!" One of the ponies reported from one of the screens, which looked a lot like the communications station. As John looked around, he noticed that every pony on the bridge was a unicorn, exempting Celestia. Where were the other species?

"Com! Give me communication with the rest of the fleet." As the pony jumped to his task, Celestia turned towards two different ponies at different screens. Defense and weapons! You must take control of the beam rods and energy shields by merging your magic with mine! I know you're rookies, but this is going to be important; we must not let Equis fall!"

The pony at the com turned to her, "Alright ma'am! You're patched into the entire fleet!"

Celestia cleared her throat and turned towards the view screen that projected her image across the entire fleet. "Ok mares and gentlecolts, this is it! We have a Forerunner fleet inbound through slipspace. However, when they arrive, they will not find cowering ponies, afraid to face the enemy, but proud equines and creatures of Equis, standing up for their home!" She could almost feel the cheers emanating from each of the ships. "Com! Get me contact with the ground team." When the pony finished, a hologram of a familiar and unwelcome figure appeared on the pedestal.

"Discord," Celestia spoke with a small bit of anxiousness in her

voice, "we are about to be attacked by Forerunners. Prepare the ground troops."

The draconequis turned, a smile on his pony face, "Ah Tia! How nice to see you! So, the Didact's finally making his move after so many years hm?"

Celestia wished she could rely on somepony else to lead the earth ponies, pegasi, and griffons on the ground, but nopony had the strategical brilliance of ground combat like Discord did. She turned towards the data table examining the flag ship of the incoming fleet. "Actually, no it is not. It appears to be the Master Builder."

Discord made a noise akin to that of coughing up a hairball, but spit out cotton candy instead. "By the sun! Does it have to be him? Even I prefer the Didact."

As Celestia was about to reply, alarms announced the arrival of the enemy fleet. The hologram deactivated as Discord left to go rally the troops.

The group of present-day had a flash in their vision as they began to see things from Celestia's point of view. One of the Forerunner dreadnaughts was the first go. An Equine destroyer near the front fired its four beam rods, each blood red line impacting with sniper precision on each of the weak points of the dreadnaught's hull. The ship exploded into a brilliant fireball and faded.

The battle was soon in full swing, with each side fighting with everything they had. The blood red beams lanced across the Master Builder's ship as it slowly advanced, doing close to no damage to it. As one of the Forerunner corvettes fired at the Celestial Radiance, the small plates came into play.

The discs shot to different positions around the front of the ship with shocking speed and immediately, a blue shield appeared in between each disc, stopping the attack cold. The Forerunners managed to land Warrior-Servants on the planet, and everypony on the surface were now fighting with all their worth.

After several hours of bloodshed, it was clear who the victor would be. The Equestrian fleet only had a third of its ships left and the ground troops were sorely outmatched and outnumbered. Celestia was now roaring orders at the remaining ships to move to different positions as strategical positioning. Suddenly, something very bad happened.

Just as Celestia was preparing to focus fire on the Master Builder's ship, a human fleet came in behind her ships out of slipspace and bombarded not only the ships in orbit with missiles, but also the ground forces below with plasma. "No!" Celestia's parents were down on the surface of the planet; it gave the soldiers more moral when the royalty was among them.

"Ma'am! The humans, their leader is the Lord of Admirals! It would appear that they're in league with the Fore-." The pony was cut off as one of the human ships vanished from the tactical display, destroyed by a particle cannon from a Forerunner Dreadnaught. This was a three-way battle; what was so important that both sides came

here to fight for it?

To make matters worse, another slipspace portal opened above the Forerunner fleet, widening to an impossibly large size. All ships, human, equine, and forerunner seemed to cease fire for a few minutes as each race stopped to watch the horror that emerged.

As the structure revealed itself from the blackness of slipspace, Celestia gasped with terror. Her intelligence spies had brought news of a great and terrible weapon built by the Forerunners. Thirteen rings designed only for one purpose, the destruction of all sentient life in the galaxy. The thirteenth ring is the smallest out of all of them; only a prototype to the oncoming vanguard. This was simply what they needed to do to test it in battle.

"All ships! Deliver control of your beam rods to Celestial Radiance and channel your energy through me!" Celestia was practically screaming now. If she didn't act immediately, this could mean the end of ponykind. She felt incredible power surge through her as the ships relinquished control of the rods to her and sent their energy to her so she could channel it. They may lose this battle, but she would guarantee their survival.

The rods formed a large cone around the battle group, all pointing at an empty space at the front of the fleet. Celestia took the power channeling through her, and poured it into each and every single rod. The runes grew to a brilliant red before firing into that empty space, forming a small sphere of gold and red energy. As the ball finished collecting the energy from the rods, Celestia used what was left of her own magic to guide the destructive weapon towards the halo ring.

The magic shot forward, the power of a thousand of Equis' most powerful unicorns all packed into a ball. Time seemed to slow for Celestia as the ball impacted with the external surface of the ring, exploding with the force of a hundred suns. The ring began to bend, until eventually, it snapped. One of the pieces collided with the aft end of the Master Builder's ship, heavily damaging the engines.

The Equine side however, was in a much worse condition. The magical blast had shorted out the beam rods, causing them to fall apart, the remains of the runes now only black marks on the silver metal. A quick check on the surface showed the troops being surrounded by Forerunner Warrior-Servants. Celestia allowed herself a small smile; Discord would never run, and his warriors looked to him for courage. They would continue until death unless told otherwise.

She let out a heavy sigh. "Com, contact the Master Builder and Lord of Admirals. We are surrendering."

"Princess Celestia, we are nearing our destination," the ancilla said from within her armor. The Forerunners had graciously allowed her one for whatever reason, despite the fact that they seemed more morbid grim than usual. She quickly trotted to the bridge. "Captain," she said respectfully to the Forerunner; Decider Of Who Gets What was a very fair and kind Forerunner compared to the others of his kind and Celestia enjoyed talking to him.

"As you have no doubt been told, we have reached the rendezvous point and are the last to arrive," said Decider in his deep rumbling voice.

She looked out to the small Forerunner ship known Peacemaker. It was a sphere less than a kilometer wide with bridges connected to a rotating ring (very different from the Halos). Around it, she could easily spot the gargantuan Human and Forerunner ships. They had gathered in temporary peace to discuss the matters of Equis' surrender.

While she did notice the Lord of Admirals' ship, she did not see the Master Builder's. "Where is the Master Builder? I thought he would be here for this." In his place, there appeared to be another ship, smaller, less weaponised, but obviously faster and still a flagship.

"Soon, after the battle was finished, the Master Builder used his spare engines and went to slipspace; the coward would not face his own judgment." Decider scoffed at the thought, then turned fully to Celestia. "Are you ready? It is time to go." When she nodded, they turned towards the hangar bay and departed to their destination.

Celestia exited the meeting room which still contained The Librarian (who came in the Master Builder's stead) and the Lord of Admirals. Her head was hung low as she described to her pony escort what the punishment was to be. They would all be devolved except for her, her powers would be lessened a great deal, and The Librarian wished to speak to her in a few minutes. She had failed her people but they still had managed to survive.

Celestia waited patiently, and when The Librarian left the room, she walked straight up to the Forerunner. "Well? What was it you needed to speak to me about?" The Librarian seemed sad to have to have this conversation with the Princess.

"We do not know when, but we will need to fire the Halos. I will need to gather samples from specifically you, and several other ponies. You will retain most of your memories except for a few. Also, while I have planted seeds in the humans so they will be able to rise again quickly, your race will not receive any such enhancements," she finished with a sad sigh. She looked to Celestia, who appeared to be in shock.

What?! They would be firing the Halos?! What about their Mantle of Responsibility? Did that no longer matter? But if it did, what would make them so desperate as to use this weapon?

With a look of pity on her face, The Librarian continued, "There is one more thing, my friend, I must ask you a favor." Celestia looked up to the Forerunner with red-rimmed eyes. What more could she possibly want? "I wish to use Equis as a hiding place for something. So, I ask you formally, may I use Equis as a planet to hide the
_"

The memory flashed white as they reached a censored area, but it was put back together just as quickly. Celestia was now standing in front of the Lord of Admirals and Librarian, as her escort came to her. After a quick glare at the human, he leaned into Celestia's ear and whispered, "Princess, your parents were killed in the battle by plasma bombardment from human ships."

She jerked her head up, anger quickly clouding her vision. With her

magic she threw Lord of Admirals against a bulkhead. As he struggled to stand, Celestia threw herself at him, firmly planting her hooves on his wrists. He met her gaze levelly, not flinching at the glare that was usually the last thing someponies would see. She spoke to him in a low voice, words dripped in a vat of acid, "I cannot kill you here, human, but if I ever see you again, you will face no mercy from me. If I ever find another human on my planet, they will not live long enough to know that you were the cause of their death." She stood away from him, turned, and left, never to look upon his face again.

The memories were finally at an end. Twilight was no longer conscious; the shock of seeing how ferocious her teacher had been had finally almost put her into a comatose state. Celestia looked to Luna, "After the Halos were fired and I was reborn, I found you; a tiny midnight blue foal made from the combined DNAs of parents. I took you in and taught you all that I knew. The Forerunners left us with enough magic to raise and lower our respected celestial bodies. Discord ended up going crazy, so I took his memories and sealed him in stone to end his misery."

Celestia then looked to John, "The person who activated my memories, that glowing blue human, where is she?"

John was about to reply when Cortana simply appeared alongside him, albeit much shorter than the Spartan. She looked to Celestia with a look of her own pity in her eyes, "You have been through a lot as well, haven't you Celestia? Not only having to live through the defeat of your people, but also through one hundred lifetimes of ponies you knew." Cortana gave a sigh, and was about to continue when the entire space turned blood red and Cortana screamed.

"AAAGGGGHHHHHHH!" Suddenly, Cortana began speaking in two voices. "Why do you always prefer him?! I am your greatest achievement, and you detest me!"

Another voice began to speak, the same, but sounded as though it was much older. "Cortana, stop. Calm yourself."

Cortana began in a whisper, but her voice quickly rose, "I don't want to, and you can't make ME!" As she screamed, tendrils of red light shot out from her distorted body and connected with everybody present, including the Master Chief.

Incredible pain shot through their bodies as Cortana attacked each of them. It was unlike any of them had ever experienced, as though someone was driving an ice-cold road spike through their brain, and when it was all the way in, twisting it.

When the pain vanished, John was the first to recover, looking to his A.I. companion. She was crouched with her hands around her knees doing what qualified as an A.I. crying. "I didn't mean to, I didn't want to. It's like there's a hundred of me all fighting for control at once." She ducked down her head in shame as the white memory spell void dispelled and she faded back into John's helmet.

As the guards rushed to see if their Princesses were alright, Twilight looked to John visor, unknowingly meeting his eyes. "What is wrong with her?" Twilight knew that, even from their few meetings,

that the blue woman was not acting like she should and that something was wrong.

It took a few seconds for John to answer, although the hesitation was still apparent in his voice. "Her name is Cortana, and she is my Artificial Intelligence companion. She is what is called a "smart" A.I. and only lives for about seven years. After seven years, they begin to go into a stage called rampancy, in which they literally think themselves to death. Cortana is seven and a half."

Twilight couldn't even begin to comprehend what it would feel like to know how short your life would be; only seven years! There had to be a way to help this mysterious human female, even if her form was just a hologram she was still there like the thoughts in one's brain. She turned and trotted past her recovered friends. "Princess! Is there any way we can help her?"

Celestia waved away her guards, reassuring them that she was now both fine and that the Chief was not a hostile. She looked at her student and thought for a few seconds. After she looked back at John who was watching them with what appeared to be indifference caused by his visor, she turned back to Twilight. "Yes, Twilight, I think there is a way we can help Cortana. I remember everything now."

Author's Note:

The other fanfiction site I post this story on didn't give this chapter too many good reviews, and I don't blame them. But now, the worst is over so bear with me.

9. Where There's a Will

"No." John was adamant. They were not going to turn him into a pony, no matter how long it would be.

The group had moved through the Everfree Forest with as much speed as possible. The exploration of the Forward Unto Dawn could wait until a later date, but for now, they had to help Cortana. Celestia hadn't specified how they would help Cortana, but he had to trust her; there was nobody else to trust.

On the trip back, John had acquainted himself with the rest of the group.

Twilight Sparkle was the leader of the group of "civilians", and possessed the title of Element of Magic. She ran the Golden Oaks library in "Ponyville" with her assistant Spike, who was apparently a baby dragon.

Fluttershy, for lack of a better term, was the group medic. Her title being the Element of Kindness, she lived in a small cottage just outside of the forest they had just come from. There, she took care of many lost, sick, or homeless animals ranging from butterflies to grizzly bears.

Rainbow Dash was the most aggressive in the group. She had the Element Loyalty as her title and John could see why. On their way back, she kept throwing him hateful and distrustful looks that obviously said, "If you attack my friends, I will stop you no matter

what."

Applejack, the Element of Honesty, had been the first to apologize to him. After the memory spell was over, she came over to him and sincerely apologized for attacking him when he was only acting in self-defense.

He almost couldn't stand Rarity, the Element of Generosity. The entire way back she was constantly complaining about how drab he looked in his armor and how she would have to design some new apparel for him.

However, the one that troubled him the most was Pinkie Pie, the Element of Laughter. She had constantly been bouncing right next to him and was constantly smiling at him as though they were best friends. He would talk to her later to learn more about her.

"I refuse to be turned into a pony." Celestia sighed in frustration; didn't this human know the consequences of walking straight through Ponyville in his current form? The panic would be unimaginable. The third option carried more risks than the other two, but it might convince John to go through with it.

"How about this, we'll simply create a hologram of pony that will replace your actual form." John nodded his approval at this option, until Celestia delivered the catch, both of them. "You'll need to be careful though, there's one pony by the name of Lyra. She's obsessed with the existence of humans, who have, until now, been thought to be a myth. The cloak won't work against her for reasons unknown to me. The second catch is that while you're invisible, you will still make noise. You need to be careful on our way to the train station."

She put a picture of what Lyra looked in his mind so he would know who to look out for. Celestia's horn became aglow once more and the golden light enveloped the Master Chief. After a bright flash of light, John looked down at his body, noting it was now perfectly invisible. Coming up to about the bottom of his rib cage, was an earth pony, whose coat was a dark green just like his armor and wore glasses that were a deep gold color. His cutie mark was that of shield with a Sangheili skull with a bullet hole in it, two swords crossing behind it. Several scars covered the length of his body, which looked as though it were made of solid muscle. The most notable feature of his holographic body, was the size; almost taller than Princess Celestia herself. If he had agreed to transformation, this was what he would become.

After making sure that everything was in order, the group strode forth into Ponyville to get to the train station, a look of grim determination set upon John's pony face. As they walked through Ponyville with no sign of the mysterious Lyra, several denizens stopped to give the humongous new pony some rather fearful looks, who not only appeared as though he had more battle experience than the entire Day and Night Guard, but could also take them all down with ease.

By the time they had reached the center of the small town, rumors had spread like wildfire, ranging from small stuff like a new recruit for the guard to the newcomer being a giant invisible alien with a holographic body which everypony quickly dismissed as false. Well, everypony except for a certain mint-green unicorn.

Lyra Heartstrings watched out her window as the group from the Everfree trotted past, apparently in a hurry. Of course, instead of a giant, terrifying, new pony, she saw the actual giant and heavily armored human. For as long as she could remember, she saw wispy spirits of the bipeds. After several years of their numbers increasing by thousands, she found an actual book on them.

The book, called "The Mystery of the Forbidden Creature", started with a small note stating that any information on humans was forbidden by Princess Celestia herself. She read through the book, which was painstakingly thin, in a matter of days. Once she finished that, she looked everywhere for more information, until she was eventually caught by the Princess of the Sun.

She was summoned to Canterlot for an audience with the royal princess, but instead of going to the throne hall, she was directed to her private quarters. A mischievous smile broke out on her face as her teenage mind thought of inappropriate topics, when she was suddenly standing in front of the enormous double doors. She pushed them open to find Princess Celestia sitting, and waiting for her. Lyra came over and sat down after a bow.

After a few minutes of silence, Celestia spoke up, "Sooooooo, humans huh?" Lyra couldn't help it, she burst out laughing. Here she was, in the presence of the most powerful being on Equis, in her bedroom, and the Princess starts with a line like that! When she was finally finished, she wiped away the tears that had come to her eyes and saw that the Princess had a small smile on her face as well.

As Lyra opened her mouth to speak, Celestia cut her off, "I do not have long, only a couple minutes; royal duties, you know. Anyways, you must never speak to another soul about humans. I already know what you see, but whatever you do, do not speak of them. However, I am allowing you to keep your book. That is all, Lyra Heartstrings. Have a nice day."

And just like that, Lyra was swept out of Celestia's magic and the door's closed. She made a face at the doors and trotted off with a laugh when she heard a muffled "I saw that!" from behind the doors.

That had been twelve years ago, and now that there was a human actually in Equestria, the princess didn't come to her?! Oh, this would not do! She quickly packed some saddlebags, yelled to Bon Bon that she would be back in a few days, and began her not so stealthy following of the group.

"That Lyra pony you told me about? She's following us," said John's rough voice from right next to Celestia's ear. She looked behind her, and sure enough, there was the mint-green unicorn, thinking she was being sneaky.

"She'll follow us to the ends of Equis, now that she has seen you."

"What can we do?"

"Nothing for now. Let her think that we have not noticed her, and we will see what she does." John nodded, satisfied with her answer. They

reached the train station and the ticket seller gawked at the two princesses and the giant pony they were escorting.

"Fifteen tickets to Canterlot I'm guessing, your Highness?" The ticket pony was tiny and couldn't see the sun past the hologram's massive form. "May I ask what your name is, sir?" he asked in a shaky voice, "I haven't seen you around before."

John thought for a moment, thinking about the names of the ponies, and decided on his own. "Call me Legend." Although he had no enormous self-ego, the name had just stuck in his head for no apparent reason so he went with it.

The ticket pony nodded his shaking head and gave each of them their tickets for free, refusing payment. Lyra purchased her tickets about five minutes later and got on the car behind them, determined to find out why they were keeping this a secret from her.

Because of John's newfound status, they had the entire car to themselves. Celestia cancelled the hologram and his invisibility. Cortana spoke through John's speakers in his helmet, "So Celestia, what is this 'way' you have of helping me?"

Celestia looked at John, and then shook her head, "I can't tell you Cortana, I'm sorry. I do not remember what the name of it is or what it does, only that it will help you and where it is." The rest of the train ride was uneventful, except for Rainbow Dash asking John about the early bits of his childhood, since she was unconscious for the first part of the memory scan. He quietly answered all of her questions, but stayed to short replies.

They pulled into the train station in Canterlot and Celestia made John invisible again, and made the hologram of Legend appear. When they got off of the train, the royal guard pony that had attacked John, whom he had found was named Honorable Service, collapsed on the platform.

The royal guard medic ran forward to the collapsed pony, draped him over his back, and carried the injured pony back to the infirmary. After a momentary pause, the group continued towards the castle in the center of the city.

The reaction to Legend was much the same as Ponyville's, just with their reactions more obvious. Some ponies stood there and looked at the colossal giant as he passed, while others locked their doors in open fright.

After thirty minutes of walking, the group finally reached the Royal sisters' castle. Celestia opened the doors, strode through the throne room straight up to her golden seat, and tore the cushion off. What it revealed, was a small hole about the size of Celestia's horn; a perfect fit in fact.

There was a click as two doors opened, one was passageway down, and the other holding the Elements, five necklaces and one tiara; each with their own unique design. "Girls, go grab the Elements and bring them with us. Guards, leave us."

As the guards opened their mouths to protest, she cut them off quickly with a firm but soft voice, "What is going to happen next, is

something that only John, Cortana, Luna, the Elements, and I will be the ones to even be present for. I will not endanger my guards unnecessarily."

As the guards quieted their protests and walked out of the hall, Celestia felt a small shake emanate from her saddlebags. She reached into them and pulled out the glass jar holding the not so lone Hunter worm. There were now three of them in the jar, so she would soon have to find a larger container.

"You kept one of the Hunter worms?" questioned John. At the sound of his voice, the worms all began crowding the side of jar closest to the Spartan.

"That's odd," said Celestia, wondering why only Master Chief's voice would get them to react this way.

"Yeah, you're telling me. I mean in the past two days, we've met a giant moving colony of worms, a giant robot, and a glowing blue human that was somehow able to use your magic against you! If you ask me, we should get rid of all of them!" Rainbow Dash was practically screaming now, all the pent up energy and anger towards John starting to release. Suddenly, she began to feel more calm, finding that Twilight's horn was aglow with a calming spell.

"Rainbow, we'll never show hostility to someone who's been through so much. He may have done it willingly, but he also did it in self-defense, from, what were they called, the Covenant?" She looked to John who nodded his head in confirmation. She turned back to her group of friends, "I will help Cortana with her rampancy, we owe them at least that much after the way we attacked them last night." As she looked to each of her friends, they all eventually nodded in agreement, some much more reluctant than others. She turned back to Celestia who gave her a small smile.

The Princesses hovered each of the Elements to their respectful owners, who each took hold placed them onto their bodies not questioning as to why they would need them; they would find out soon enough. The group came up to second door, pausing momentarily to light their magic, then proceeding down into the Canterlot caverns.

Lyra bolted into the throne, quick as lightning. She walked up to the small door, when it began to rumble. The door was starting to close! She shot through the door, getting in just in time. She looked at the stone door and gave out a sigh of relief; continuing her journey after the group.

As they walked through the maze of giant crystals, Cortana broke her long silence, speaking only to John. "Chief, I've been taking readings of each of these rocks; they're all diamond!" She was stalling on a conversation with John and they both knew it. She sighed as she got to the point, "John, I know I was telling you to trust these ponies, but after seeing Celestia's memories, I'm not sure I can. What is all of this is just some type of trick to breach the Cole Protocol?"

"Cortana, I will do anything to make sure that you survive; just remember that." John finished the conversation and they walked on in silence, both mulling disturbing thoughts in their minds.

Finally, after about another hour of walking, they reached their destination. Large Forerunner metal doors rose up before them. As John walked forward to press the holographic panel that had appeared, his armor system locked up and his visor turned red, as Cortana became more rampant than ever before.

As he fell to one knee, Luna rushed forward. "What is wrong human?! What's happening?!"

"It's Cortana! Quickly, take the chip out of the back of my helmet; that is where she is!" They had to hurry and get the rampant A.I. out of his armor before she did too much damage to his armor. Luna successfully pulled out the chip, John's visor and armor instantly returning to normal.

The built-in holographic projector activated as Cortana appeared, flickering between blue and red. "Hurry! I won't be able to hold myself together much long-AGGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHH!" The projector shut down as Cortana retreated. The group paused, then began to make their way to the doors, when suddenly, a voice rang out behind them.

"Princess Celestia!"

Five minutes earlier

Lyra looked at the giant crystals around her, eyes widening in awe. She would have to bring some home! She was about to continue her trek after the group when her vision faded to black.

After panicking for a few seconds, she found her sight coming back, just not in the Crystal Caverns. Instead she found herself floating above Canterlot with an amazing view of the entire city! Looking at the clock down in the city, she found it also to be present time.

Suddenly, a great, dark, shadow blotted out the sun over Canterlot. Wondering how many pegasi it would take to move such a large cloud, she rotated around to see the cloud. However, she did not see a cloud. Instead, she saw-

Lyra gasped as she came back to herself in the Caverns. As she looked to the ground, she saw the hoofprints, and large oval-like footprints embedded into the ground. She followed them, running as fast as she possibly could. She rounded a corner to see the armored human standing back up, Princess Luna holding a small metal rectangle in her right hoof.

The group began to move forward towards the large metal doors in the walls of the caverns. She yelled out with all her strength, "Princess Celestia!"

The group stopped and turned to see who was following them. When she saw who it was, Celestia got a smile on her face. She opened her mouth to speak, but Lyra cut her off. "Celestia! You've got to come quick! Canterlot's under attack by changelings!"

After a moment of silence in which Celestia did a quick spell to view the outside world, her face hardened into that of a seasoned leader. "Lyra, I need you to return to the city. Rally the troops and get as many of them to defend the castle," she looked to the A.I. chip in Luna's hoof, "We'll need them to buy as much time as possible."

John cut in at this moment, "Shouldn't your priority be to defend your people? The defense of this city matters more than Cortana." Seeing the ponies look at him in shock, he realized that they were wondering how he could care so little about his friend. "Cortana and I are both made to put the defense of civilians before ourselves."

The disappointment in John Celestia felt faded as understanding spread through her. "I understand how you feel, but completing this is so important, it may even help us repel this second changeling invasion." She walked over to John's armored form and lay a hoof on his giant arm. "I need you to help us, Master Chief. I know that we are not in any position to make requests of you, but please, for Cortana's sake."

John looked around to each member of the group that had brought him here. On each of their faces, all he saw were looks of encouragement, even on Rainbow Dash's. Cortana appeared in the projector, flickering, but much better. "I'll be okay, John," she said in a soft but urgent voice, "Now, go save the day again," she finished with a small smile, disappearing into the small device.

Giving out a small sigh, he reluctantly turned to the mint-green unicorn standing next him, "We'll need to get there as quickly as possible; I'll need to carry you." As he finished his sentence, Lyra jumped up and down with excitement before nodding her head so enthusiastically that it seemed as though it would fall off. He grabbed her with one hand, then tucking her underneath his arm.

After checking that his passenger was secure, he ran back to the entrance as fast as he could. He barely heard the ponies behind him gasp as they were shocked at how fast he was. Celestia simply smiled as she lit up her horn; replacing the illusion of Legend at Master Chief's position. She turned back to the group and opened the Forerunner doors, "Well, let's get this over with ponies."

As John ran through the Crystal Caverns, he heard Lyra give out a shout of joy. He felt a small smile twitch his lips at how innocent she was, before returning to the task at hand. He bolted up the stairs, reaching the top in a fourth of the time it took going down. When he got there, the two found the door to already be open.

As they burst through the portal, they caught glimpses of light; green, purple, blue, almost every color in the rainbow. He set Lyra down as they reached the throne room doors. He placed his hands onto the doors, looking to Lyra, "When I open these doors, be prepared for anything. We're going directly into a battle zone, so keep your head down while you rally the troops."

Seeing her nod of acknowledgement, the Chief pushed open the doors to the full-blown chaos he had predicted. Left and right, ponies of the Royal Guard, both Day and Lunar, fought insect-like equines that John

took to be changelings. As he observed the battle, he saw the changelings dive from the sky, creating a shield of green fire around themselves before crashing into the ground, effectively making bombs.

Suddenly, one such "bomb" came racing towards him. He reached for his assault rifle, grabbing nothing as he realized he had left all of his weapons at the phantom crash site. However, he still had the most powerful weapon in his arsenal; the Mjolnir armor.

He side-stepped the fiery adversary, causing it to crash into the doors behind him. He turned, ready to begin his first fight of the day, only to see two panic-stricken faces of Lyra. Now understanding why they were called changelings, he examined both for any differences, finding none.

He racked his brain for an answer, suddenly thinking of another possible solution. He changed his visor to thermal, and it worked. What he had worked out was that these changelings' armor had to be incredibly hard, almost like stone, for them to survive both the fire that surrounded them and the impact with the ground, therefore, their thermal signatures would appear as blue compared to a normal pony's being the regular orange and red.

He began his assault on the left Lyra, shooting forward and grabbing the fake by the throat, he lifted the creature into the air with ease. Before it could screech for reinforcements, John dropped it, bringing his other hand around in a right hook. His hand, still looking like a hoof, impacted into the side of changeling with the force of a warthog at maximum speed.

The creature's armor shattered instantly, dropping the illusion, showing all that remained of the changeling's abdomen were crushed organs. John dropped the corpse and looked at Lyra, who had a horrified look on her face. Not having time for her recovery, John picked her up and carried her to the closest cover.

"I'm going to assist where needed around the city. You grab as many guards as you can, tell them that with thermal sight, changelings appear cold, and bring them back here to get the Princess more time." John's voice was, as usual, with close to no emotion at all. Lyra nodded her shaky head and turned to set out, when John slightly touched her shoulder, "Be careful Lyra."

Suddenly, the human was gone, leaving Lyra to gather guards in front of the castle. She looked at the new craters in the street and said to herself, "Well, buck."

The entire city was in mass chaos. Swarms of changelings descended upon civilians, carrying them off to who knows where. Guards were surrounded and neutralized. It was almost certainly a lost battle. Until John came in that is.

He burst seemingly out of nowhere, crushing changelings left and right with his fists. To the guards, they saw a giant pony that was unstoppable. He rushed over to the guards, quickly breaking up the gel around their feet. "Move to the palace and defend it no matter what. You must buy the Princess more time."

And with that, he was gone, off to save more guards. The two that had

just been saved looked at each other, shrugged, and headed off to the palace.

There are so many! John was incredibly powerful with a large amount of endurance, but even he was beginning to tire from the constant fighting. He was beginning to become surrounded by changelings; the entire population of changelings in the city knew who the real threat was.

They stopped engaging in physical combat, forming an open ring around the Spartan. John, realizing that they were no longer within reach, stopped his attacks to conserve energy. Their spiked horns began to glow a collective eerie green, signifying that they were about to send a large magical blast his way.

They fired, and John brought his arms up to his face, trying to shield himself from the oncoming fire. It never hit. John looked up to see a spherical red shield surrounding him and another pony; a unicorn dressed in the golden armor of a Royal Day guard.

His cutie mark was that of a spell book with archaic writings upon the pages; obviously much more complex than that of the few books John had seen in Twilight's saddle bags. He had a grey coat and black mane and tail. There was also a strange hat on his head, but John decided not to question it. The pony turned towards him, looking at his visor rather than Legend's face. "I can see right through that silly little illusion of yours human. The magic Celestia used to cover you was a tiny amount, not enough to hide you from me." The pony looked at John again and sighed, "Where are my manners," he began, extending a hoof, "My name is Book Master, but you may just call me Book; ponies don't seem to like it when I say they can call me Master," he said with a chuckle.

John reached down and shook the hoof, noticing that behind Book Master, a changeling had gotten brave and was about to touch the crimson shield. Book whirled around, a growl emanating from his throat and black mist appearing to have started flowing from the whites of his eyes. "WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!" He yelled at the poor changeling. A claw made of pure darkness erupted from the ground, grabbed the creature by the middle, and flung it against a wall, breaking its armor. Book recomposed himself and spoke to John without looking, "I am going to drop the shield in three seconds, prepare to fight."

John nodded in acknowledgement, but when the shield flickered, showing it was about to drop, a loud scream of pure insanity was heard from across the courtyard, "BURN, BABY BURN!"

John, Book, and the changelings surrounding them turned their attention to the north end of the courtyard, where a pillar of neon green fire erupted, incinerating about half of the changelings there. In the center of the inferno, there stood a lone Lunar guard with a neon green mane and tail, a dark grey coat, a long jagged scar down the left side of her neck, and a cutie mark the shape of a green fireball.

The flames surrounded her, abiding to the will of her horn; eyes glowing green, she formed the fire into whips, smacking and incinerating anything that wasn't a pony. She cackled in her pyromaniac induced state, reveling in the joy of flames.

Book paled a little as he watched the Lunar guard, "I've never seen Neon Fire so crazy. She might even attack us." Neon Fire continued attacking in front of her, failing to notice the company of changelings sneaking around to her flank.

They attacked, ready to draw blood, but they were stopped. By stopped, I mean they were crushed in between two large slabs of iron. "That was way too close! Thanks Iron Shot! I'd hate to see anything happen to Neon's wonderful flank!" shouted a orange-coated and golden-maned pegasus. He wore a baseball cap that was mostly black, but painted camouflage on the front. He had a cutie mark that represented protection of others. He jumped on the back of another changeling, pulling out two small daggers, and began stabbing into its back.

The giant unicorn named Iron Shot simply grunted, pulled out a crossbow, and shot a bolt clean through a changeling at about one hundred yards. Putting away his crossbow, he pulled out two short swords and leapt straight into the middle of the battle; the Lunar guard dispatching anything in his way with a quiet determination.

Neon Fire, now seeming to be more in control of herself, yelled out to the orange pegasus, "How nice of you to join the party, Camo Flash! I was sure you'd gone with the rest of the Day guard to hide in front of the palace!"

The two obviously knew each other, but Camo Flash simply smiled and continued fighting. He cut through the throat of a changeling in front of him, only to have another jump above its fallen comrade. It stretched out its teeth, reaching out to attack the defenseless pony in front of him.

Camo ducked, prepared for his imminent doom, and found it all to be for naught; just as the changeling reached him, a gunshot rang out, impacting into the changelings temple. Its head burst open in a spray of green blood.

John looked in the direction the shot had come from, spotting the likely tower. Using his helmet's zoom function, he magnified the tower and found another pony (a pegasus), this one much like what a UNSC marine would look like, with his hair shorn close to the skin. He wore the armor of a Lunar guard, but the weirdest part, was that he had the teeth of a human, saying he's an omnivore. The next odd part was his weapon, definitely a human sniper rifle.

"Ah, I see you've found Silent Scout hm? He is quite the mystery; you two should get along smashingly. Now, we should get into fun while there is still some to be had. I'm dropping the shield." True to his word, Book let the shield fade, and the two jumped into the battle.

Reinforcements came in for the changelings, making the sea of black more dense. No matter how many John crushed with his fists, Book Master threw with his dark magic, Neon Fire incinerated with fire, Iron Shot crushed with metal, Camo Shot stabbed with daggers, and Silent Scout shot, there were always more. At one point, John caught a glimpse of a changeling larger than the rest, with blood-red bordering his armor. Then, he was gone.

Eventually, John was separated from the others. He continued fighting, trying to make his way back, when the changelings just stopped attacking him. Confused, John looked around at the changelings. A voice crackled in on his radio, "Human, this is Silent Scout. I can see your actual form on thermal, so don't freak out. Now, the others have been defeated. They've been placed in the center of the courtyard with five changelings preparing a magic blast; all of the other changelings have stopped fighting to give those five all their energy. It's gonna be one hell of a blast."

John weighed the options in his mind as the signal was cut off due to the rising amount of radiation of magic. He looked around, quickly spotting the open area containing his new comrades. He pushed through the crowd as the five continued building power.

Time began to slow. John pushed past the final line of changelings. The five released their spell. He ran at two times his normal speed. The green line (similar to a hunter's) inched forward. At the last moment, John placed himself between the beam and his comrades.

The pain was unlike any he had ever felt. It felt as though first, it invaded his body, forced all organs to temporarily shut down, then start burning a hole in his body. It had impacted a couple of inches to the left of the small of his back. He was barely aware that as his shields took most of the impact, the magic bolt seemed to come under more stress.

The hologram known as Legend failed because of the overload of magic, leaving him in his actual form. His shields continued to hold off the onslaught of magic, until the stress of it all broke under pressure.

A blast the likes of a bomb able to level an entire city block erupted from the point of contact; every changeling present was thrown off their feet. John slowly opened his eyes to see Camo Flash shaking him awake. "C'mon! Wake up! I don't know what you are, but I'm not gonna let you die while I still owe you a favor!"

John groaned and sat up, much to Camo's delight. He tried to stand but was knocked back down as pain erupted in his side. He looked down to see the damage; a three inch wide hole had been punched straight through his abdomen, missing anything too vital, but he needed help fast.

He pushed the pain to somewhere he could ignore it, and stood. Many of the changelings backed away in fear. Suddenly, the ocean of black split apart to reveal the red-accented changeling.

In a deep gravelly voice like an Elite's he spoke to John, "Congratulations, creature. You are the first to survive a combined blast from the hive. My name is General Trickery, here in the queen's stead. But now, I'm afraid I must kill you; a creature so dangerous that he could slay hundreds of our kin in a single battle!" He finished with rage laced throughout his voice. He began charging his own magic to finish the Spartan, when the unexpected happened for the tenth time that day.

The skies began to darken, and the sound of stone moving against stone was heard throughout the city. A bluish magic began coalescing

into one spot, and female voice rang out among the changelings, starting low, and ending in a scream, "I will not, allow you, to kill. My. HUMAN!" At the end of the shout, a shockwave erupted from the gathered energy, shattering every window in the courtyard.

At ground zero, stood a bright light too bright to make out anything contained within. A column of blue magic shot into the sky above Canterlot, forming what was recognizable only to a few ponies (and human); a slip-space portal. One by one, the changelings, being the only ones affected, were swept into the tornado formed by the column of magic; each being sucked into blackness of slip-space. Several, such as General Trickery, were lucky and flung out Canterlot towards the Badlands once again.

The portal closed, erupting in a spherical, white, shockwave. After it passed, John looked towards the source of the light to see an alicorn. Her coat was blue, with her mane and tail being navy. Light pulsed in small waves down her body, starting at the base of her horn and ending at her back hooves. On her flank was a forerunner glyph, of what, he had no idea. Her eyes stared into John's with a brilliant blue divinity.

She stepped forward with nearly infinite grace, the air around her radiating with power. "The battle is won, warriors. Rest now."

John watched her with careful eyes, managing to force out one word, before collapsing to the ground unconscious.

"Cortana?"

11. What Lies Behind Those Doors?

John continually drifted in and out of consciousness. When he awoke the first time, he was being carried over the ground in an aura of many different colors; it took six unicorns to lift him off the ground. After that, each time he awoke for a few seconds, he was in a different place. He was being carried through a crowd of ponies. He was going through a set of doors. He was in a long white room.

When he finally regained full consciousness, he found himself lying in a soft white bed; extremely uncomfortable for the hardcore soldier. He attempted sitting up, but found that to be too much of a stress.

He barely heard the clip clop of hooves on tile, not even noticing the new presence until they were directly next to his bed. He looked to his side, noticing the mocha brown earth pony with a dark brown mane and tail, his cutie mark being an hourglass.

"Who are you?" John asked, not fully trusting this new visitor.

"Just call me the Doctor," he replied in a British accent, "I'm only here to make sure that your armor won't turn everything within a mile into molecular dust or anything." He pulled out a small device, looking much like a small pen. The device whirred to life as he scanned John's armor. John moved to resist, but his armor suddenly locked up.

When the Doctor finally finished his examination, John's armor unlocked. "Well, I'll be going now. Fortunately enough, you will not be turning into a fireball that could destroy the entire city! Have a nice day!" And with that, the strange pony left the room, tapping one of the bottles feeding liquid into John's arm. John began to lose consciousness again, but not before he saw 'The Doctor' pull out his small device and lock the infirmary doors. Then, the darkness overtook him as a voice spoke in his mind.

"So misguided."

Chrysalis sat upon her obsidian throne, rubbing her hoof against her temple as changeling soldiers brought in reports from all over the Bad Lands, so many victories over small villages. But, there was only one report she wanted to hear; how had the attack on Canterlot gone? She'd sent a force ten times larger than before, so Canterlot had to have fallen by now.

As the soldiers in front of her continued their reports, a bang echoed throughout the great black halls as a familiar form stumbled in.

"Ah, General Trickery! Was the attack on..." She trailed off, just now noticing the blood dripping from multiple fractures in his armor, his eyes wide in madness. "What's wrong?"

"Demons! Monsters! Abominations in Canterlot!" He stumbled to the base of the throne before collapsing with white foam bubbling up in his mouth.

"Medic!" roared Chrysalis, anxious to hear about these new demons in Canterlot. Her eyes began to glow red as she grew impatient with the medics. She reached out with her magic and forcefully awoke the general, not caring for any damage it did to his mind. She lifted him up, bringing him in front of her, and spoke in an unrecognizable voice that sounded ancient and powerful, "What are these new creatures you speak of?"

Trickery somehow managed to get out a few words, "New alicorn. Strange bipedal demon. Demon took out a third of our forces single-hoofedly. Alicorn managed to take them all out." And with that, he passed out and would not reawaken.

Chrysalis placed him back on the ground as medics rushed in, and sat upon her throne, lost in thoughts that were not hers. 'Could the humans have finally returned to this world? All I need now is to become free, and then I shall take back what is rightfully mine.'

Unknown to anybody, Chrysalis had not been in control of her body for many years, an imprint having taken over her mind. The attack on Canterlot had been rouse, for the imprint had been trying to find something that Celestia had hidden.

The imprint used her magic to reach all the way out to Canterlot, feeling for a specific presence. There, the life force of a human, but fading quickly into unconsciousness. It felt around his mind, seeing that he now felt safe and secure due to drugs being used to keep him sedated. The imprint scoffed, before unintentionally speaking in John's mind, "So misguided."

"C'mon man, wake up!"

John stirred as a hoof shook his shoulder. He cracked open his eyes to see an orange and gold blur standing over him. He jolted awake, shoved the blur away, and prepared to roll out of the bed, reaching for his pistol.

Three things stopped him; the absence of armor, the hole in his abdomen, and all of the tubes attached to his limbs. He stopped, bringing his fists up, ready to fight.

As his vision finally began to clear up, he saw that the pegasus he had shoved away was now stuck in the wall, drywall cracking around him. He fell out of the wall onto the floor flat on his face, not making a noise as he did so. John lowered his arms when he realized that it was only Camo Flash, and would have gone over to help him if not for all the tubes attached to him.

Camo got up with a groan, shaking off the dust of his orange coat. "Well, good morning to you too," he said, a hint of irritation laced throughout his voice. A look of remembrance popped up on his face as he remembered what he had come here to tell John. "Princess Cortana would like to see you. She had these clothes designed for you." All hints of irritation had vanished from his voice as pointed to a set of clothes, looking much like a UNSC uniform.

John walked over to the clothes, ripped off the tiny hospital gown, and started putting on the fabrics. He stopped, half-way dressed, "Wait, Princess Cortana?"

Celestia sat upon her throne, drinking a soothing cup of tea. After she, Luna, and the elements had turned Cortana into an alicorn, all eight of them had collapsed into unconsciousness for several hours, unable to take part in the battle.

They had temporarily panicked, seeing that Cortana was no longer in the cavern with them. They had rushed top side to see the new alicorn leading a group of unicorns who were using their combined magic to lift the heavy Spartan.

Cortana hadn't looked much better herself, almost as though she had taken on every single changeling in Canterlot. After a few inquiries, Celestia learned of the slip space portal sucking all of the changelings into the empty void. Such straining on her magic just after gaining a body had taken its toll; Cortana had been resting in one of the guest rooms inside the castle, still unused to the limitations of the physical body.

However, she had proved most useful in helping get John's armor off after he had been lying in bed for a while. It only proved to show why humans constantly wore clothes no matter what situation they were in to Celestia's eternal embarrassment. She had quickly looked away and placed a hospital gown over his unmoving body.

She set aside her now empty cup as a brown earth pony stallion walked in through the doors. He casually walked through the hall until he came to the base of her throne, and spoke in an odd accent, "Oh, it's absolutely wonderful that Equis has finally made contact another being outside of space! Even if that alien has a tracker set that

will bring more to it that might attract the attention of other unwanted alien species, it's all wonderful!"

Celestia sighed at Dr. Whoove's eccentric attitude, "All I want to know right now, is if his armor is a danger to anypony." She currently had a headache and did not have the patience for his craziness. He shook his head wildly in reply to her question. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go check on our guest," she said a little snappily.

"Well, it must be that time of century," he said in a small mocking voice and turned, leaving the hall while humming a tune to himself.

Celestia sighed again as Luna walked in through one of the side doors. "Dear Sister, could you please watch over the throne for me while I go visit Cortana?" Luna had a sympathetic look in her eyes; she and the elements had gone through the same thing Celestia had. The two of them being alicorns, they were more powerful and not as affected, but the six elements were still in a comatose state almost two days later. Celestia was not worried; she knew they would awake soon.

As Luna nodded her head, it took all of Celestia's willpower not to go straight to her own bed, going instead to Cortana's guest room. As she walked into the large guest room, she noticed that Cortana was not resting in the bed, but instead standing at the balcony, looking out upon Canterlot.

Without turning, she spoke to Celestia, "This is the first thing I have seen with an actual physical body; it's beautiful." She finally turned to face Celestia, her glowing blue eyes piercing straight into her. "Just by looking out upon this city I can tell that it took thirty years to build and has been standing for well over three thousand."

Celestia was a little surprised, even though she knew every alicorn had their own special talent. The others, such as Cadance, had not usually shown such an astute understanding of everything around them so quickly. "As I've no doubt you know already, an alicorn is always a royal, so, that makes you a princess of Canterlot."

Cortana gave out a small sigh, "I do know already. I've already gone through over ten thousand different scenarios and they all lead back to royalty."

Celestia's mouth dropped open. The new alicorn had only been awake for about two hours, yet she had been able to completely think through that many different scenarios. "Well, I think that gives you a title." Cortana looked back over to her with tired eyes.

"Well? What is my new title as a royal alicorn of the grand city of Canterlot?" Celestia motioned her forward and as Cortana came to a stop before the Princess of the Sun, Celestia lowered her horn onto each of Cortana's shoulders.

"As of right now, you shall forever more be known as Cortana, Princess of Intellect."

Thirty minutes later

John walked barefooted through the halls of the Canterlot Palace; they had been unable to get new shoes fitted for him. With a contingent of guards following closely behind and a guide in front of him, he began to unconsciously ready his fists as if for a fight. When the guards had first shown up, he had suspected that they were there because he wasn't trusted. He soon learned that they were instead there for his protection.

It made him nervous though; if they were attacked by a stronger enemy, he would have to protect them. They hadn't had the training he'd had. He stepped into the hallway that led to the throne room. As he walked down the passage, his feet sinking into the lush carpet, he noticed a newly polished window stain. He stopped before it and examined the new window.

It showed a white courtyard, with a green armored human taking a blast from a hive of changelings for a small group of guards. Directly above it, a neon blue alicorn had a pillar of magic rising from her body to form an unmistakable slipspace portal. He noticed the black fragments of glass appearing to be sucked into the void, realizing they represented the changelings. However, there was nothing on the changelings that had been sent flying into the rocky crags known as the Badlands.

John quietly looked at the stained glass, until he felt a small poke from his guide. He looked down to the small pony, noting the wide eyes in his face sported; he was scared, but of both John and being late to this meeting. John let out a sigh and followed the pony through the rest of the hall.

There were more windows in the hall, but John ignored them and focused on the ahead objective. They turned another corner and found themselves facing a large set of doors. The guide poked his head in, "Princesses, we have him here. Shall I bring him in now?"

A muffled voice was heard from within, and the guide withdrew his head and nodded John forward. As he walked through the doorway he was briefly reminded of the briefing room directly after he and some other Spartans destroyed Cote de Azur on the planet of Sigma Octanus IV. However, missing was the feeling he usually got when the bullets started flying.

He strode through the fifty meter long hallway in a matter of seconds. Once he came within ten feet of the golden throne, guards scrambling to catch up with him, he snapped his feet together and brought his hand to a salute at his forehead. "Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan-117 reporting as ordered Sirs!" He felt the muscles in his right arm pull at the skin around the hole in his body, but he took the pain and pushed it to somewhere he wouldn't notice it.

He looked upon the throne, examining the four beings that stood on and around it. On the golden throne was Celestia herself, her smile as radiant as the sun. To her right sat Luna, her emotions carefully hidden behind a mask and as mysterious as the dark side of the moon. To Celestia's left sat another alicorn, her coat a light pink, and her mane and tail the colors of purple, pink, and cream. She looked at him with a look of curiosity. Suddenly, shock filled her face as John felt a presence in his mind withdraw that he hadn't noticed was there. She looked rather disturbed as he examined the last regal

pony; Cortana. She only met his eyes, as only one emotion stayed on her face. She looked like any AI would, both an analytical look in her eyes and a thirst for knowledge.

Celestia looked at Cortana, raising an eyebrow in question to John's raised hand. Cortana made a little motion with her hoof and realization dawned on Celestia's face. A small twitch at the sides of her lips formed as she brought her hoof to her white horn and said, "Relax, Chief."

He dropped his hand, folded both behind his back, brought his feet to shoulder-width, and stood at parade rest. "You needed to speak with me Princesses?"

"Yes, we need to speak with you about the hole in your abdomen," Celestia said, "We can heal such an injury. But first, we feel we need to show you how we gave Cortana a physical form and ultimately saved her from rampancy. Follow us."

John unfolded his hands and followed at respectful distance behind the four alicorns. They led him through the maze of corridors and past the windows. "John," Celestia spoke again, "Come up here with us please, there is something else we need to discuss with you." John picked up his speed and easily caught up with the quadrupeds. "We have been planning on going back and investigating your ship Forward Unto Dawn, and we were wondering after you healed if you would come with us?"

"Yes." John spoke with absolutely no hesitation. He needed to go as well; if he didn't one of the ponies could get hurt from some of the many weapons stored in the back half of the frigate. "Permission to speak ma'am?"

When Celestia nodded her head, John said, "I was wondering about the hunter worms. How much have they multiplied since I was last awake?"

Celestia stopped and turned to him, a her eyes wide, "They have become hundreds. We will have to find another container other than the five hundred gallon aquarium."

"I would suggest going back to the Phantom. There was a suit of armor for a hunter inside of it."

A few minutes later, the procession finally came to a halt in front of the door that led down into the Crystal Caverns. Luna turned to him, "Now that this doorway has opened, all of our researchers are down there examining every piece of ground except inside the room we last separated from; we sealed those doors."

The group then went down the spiraling stairs and eventually reached the bottom, stepping out into the same large crystal cave as before. As Luna had said, the room was crawling with ponies in white coats, each stopping at the same time to stare at John in wonder.

"Leave us! We must show the Bane of Changelings something the rest of you may not. I am sorry." John had to admit, Celestia could have a loud voice when she wanted to. The science ponies filed out of the large cavern, not a single one not grumbling.

"The Bane of Changelings?" John asked incredulously.

Celestia suppressed a small laugh, "That is the name for you the locals and Royal Guard have come up with. It seems appropriate to me." The rest of the alicorns got a small smile as well, even Cortana.

As they were walking, John began to walk next Cortana, "Are you going to tell me what lies behind the doors?"

Cortana's eyes widened in wonder, "Oh it's beyond anything I have ever seen! The Halos were majestic in their own right, but this, this is something else." She wouldn't say anymore, so John waited until they stood before the large silver doors.

Celestia's horn came aglow with magic and the monolithic doors slid open, revealing a chamber that was entirely Forerunner metal. As they walked into the room, John spotted what they had used on Cortana.

He looked upon the angularly curved object. It was about two hundred meters tall with a hexagonal shape. Blue lights much like Cortana's ran in organized lines up and down the entire artifact.

"This, John, is what the Librarian herself asked me to hide," Celestia spoke with awe apparent in her voice. Just before she spoke again, John felt a sharp pain in his side. Looking down, he noticed the blood spreading from his abdomen; he had exerted himself too much.

As his vision began to blur and fade, he heard Celestia finish just before he hit the ground.

"It is called the Composer."

12. New World, Old Acquaintances

Ivanoff Station, Installation 03

July 27th, 2556 (UNSC Calendar)

"Doctor Tillson, this is Aladdin requesting permission to bring Doctor Halsey and Arbiter Thel Vadam aboard to examine the new Forerunner artifact." Dr. Tillson gave them the permission they needed as the cloaked prisoner ship revealed itself. Their hangar doors opened to reveal the elderly but just as sharp doctor and the eight and a half foot tall Sangheili warrior.

Not many people knew that Halsey was still alive, much less the elites. In fact, the Arbiter only knew because Admiral Osman had decided recently to tell him to build trust between the UNSC and Covenant.

As her hands were uncuffed, Halsey looked at Tillson with the same look a superior has when looking upon someone lesser. Without even asking where to go, Halsey walked past her and straight down a hallway. Tillson looked at the Sangheili next to her with a tired look. Thel had elected to come not in his silver Arbiter armor, but instead in the robes of an elder of his people. She knew he carried an energy sword somewhere within the folds of the fabric just in

case.

She didn't know why he had requested to come along, only getting a reply from him that he felt he needed to when she asked about it. She led him along down the hallways, eventually catching up to Halsey, who had stopped at a closed door which she couldn't open without clearance.

She looked impatiently at Tillson, who walked forward with her keycard and opened the bulkhead doors. As Halsey walked into the medium sized room, she noticed four different reactions among the scientists gathered there; awe, disgust, fear, and indifference. 'Good, they should fear me, after what I've done,' she finished with a brief flash of guilt.

She simply pushed through the crowd to the room which contained the Forerunner device relocated from the surface of Installation 03. It was circular in nature, with medium sized slivers of metal making a spiral design. At about five meters in diameter, it was rather small for a Forerunner device.

Halsey walked forward with a thirst for knowledge present on her face. She cautiously reached out and touched the surface of the metal. It felt cool to the touch and didn't dissolve and absorb her immediately, so she was off to a good start. Thel and Tillson approached from behind and stayed at a respectful distance.

"When did you find this?" Halsey was insanely curious. This was obviously a type of Forerunner gateway, but there were no markings saying to where it went.

"We found it about four weeks ago on this section of the ring," said Tillson, bringing up a hologram of Installation 03 with the help of the station's AI. Halsey walked forward, using her hands to zoom onto that certain section of the weapon. She examined the crater left over from excavating the gateway.

She walked back to the portal, muttering quietly under her breath. Tillson called out her, "It's useless! We've had all of our best minds trying to get a response from it, but it won't do anything!"

Halsey connected her data pad to the system inside of the portal. "Well, you never had me try it yet, Sandra. I have a feeling your scientists never tried something, like, this." As Halsey finished her statement, the slivers forming a spiral dissolved and began spinning to become a now open portal with a strong resemblance to a slip space rupture.

Tillson, the scientist in her fully awoken, slowly stepped forward with wonder. "I've never seen anything like this!" She reached out and touched the metal. Other than the spinning vortex's image adjusting to her hand, there was no change at all. She turned to Halsey, "What did you do? We tried everything but never got a reaction from it!"

Halsey looked at her like a teacher would with a 'special' student. "It was incredibly simple. All I did was use the Forerunner glyph for open, put in equations for the diameter of the border, and accounted the amount of space taken up by each of the slivers in the center."

Halsey finished with an explanation that Tillson slightly understood, but left Thel completely floored; Halsey truly was the greatest thinker of their time.

Thel regained his senses after several second, shaking his head and speaking to Halsey, "But how do we tell where it goes Doctor? It was a great accomplishment getting it to open, but it could lead back to Sangehelios or to the center of a star!"

Halsey became lost in thought again, then replied, "Well, Arbiter Thel Vadam, there is only one way to find out." She began to walk towards the open doorway, and just as Thel reached out to stop her, a nearby explosion rumbled through the entire station, knocking Tillson and Thel off of their feet and Halsey stumbled away from the portal.

Tillson got out the radio she kept in her shirt pocket and began desperately asking questions into it. "What happened?! Was there a mining accident on one of the asteroids?"

A voice crackled in on radio in reply to her query, "No ma'am! It's the Covenant cultist leader Jul Mdama! They've breached the hangar doors and are quickly spreading through the station! Several of their capitol ships are going straight past the station to the ring; it's what they're after!" Suddenly, an explosion blasted through the speaker on the handheld radio, quickly followed by screams, and then silence.

Tillson dropped the radio and fell to her knees. She thought for a few seconds, and then gained a determined but sad face. She stood back up and turned to Thel and Halsey, "Arbiter, you must take her through the portal. This is the best chance you'll have to get her to safety." She quickly pressed an object to Halsey's hand and backed away.

"What about you?" asked Thel, obviously a little worried that it sounded like she wasn't coming with them.

She slowly replied, "Well, there is something I must stay behind to do. Quickly, go!" And with that, she gave him a little push on uneven ground which sent him tumbling into Halsey, causing them both to fall into the open portal. Tillson tried, but she couldn't help but laugh; from both their comical exit and the finality she began to feel.

She walked through the empty hallways, hearing the sounds of battle in different parts of the station. When she eventually reached her quarters, she walked over to the safe next to her desk and unlocked it. She pulled out the small handheld device and slowly walked to a window overlooking the ring, serenely spinning in the heavens.

"So beautiful, for something so dangerous," she sighed. She opened the panel on the device and quickly typed in her pass code. As the green light lit up signifying it was ready, her door blasted open as a squad of five Sangheili stormed in. One stepped forward and spoke in slurred English.

"You are to come with us, human. Our leader Jul Mdama awaits your interrogation about the holy ring." The elite warrior was impatient obviously enough, but she slowly turned towards him.

"Your people will never learn the secrets of this ring," she said quietly, and pressed down on the green button on the detonator. As the elites watched, twenty miniature suns appeared on a section of the Halo's surface as the Havok-Class nuclear mines were detonated. The giant piece of metal broke off, spinning erratically out of control.

As Tillson closed her eyes for the last time, she thought out to Halsey, "Let the information on that small flash drive help you Catherine." It was funny, she could almost hear Jul's enraged scream as the section of the Halo smashed into the station, leaving nothing behind.

John heard muffled voices at the side of his bed. However, before his hearing returned, he noticed that he felt quite strange. He did a quick checklist of his body, suddenly realizing that...

He was completely healed and still human. His hearing returned with brutal suddenness, although he could now hear the conversation going on.

"Leave now you petty guard! I will speak to this 'Bane of Changelings' alone! Leave now!" John heard a grunt of annoyance and the sound of hooves retreating and then the shutting of a door. He turned his head to this newcomer, spotting a pony with a white coat and blond mane. "So, you're the famous Bane of Changelings."

"Who are you?" John queried, being incredibly cautious as was in compliance with the soldier in him.

"Shut up scum! You stupid blathering idiot, I am your superior, Prince Blueblood! And you have ruined my plan to usurp Celestia's throne!" He pulled a knife out from the coat he was wearing and approached John's bedridden figure.

John tensed up, "What do you mean?"

Blueblood looked at him with disgust, "Who do you think let Chrysalis in and gave her a position to take Cadence's place? Who do you think gave her general the times of when the guards switched? You have ruined my plans, and now you're going to pay for them." The Princeling walked forward and raised his knife, ready to strike.

Suddenly, John's fist shot forward and hit Blueblood square in the mouth. He made sure he held back about ninety percent of his strength, so he only broke Blueblood's jaw and sent him flying across the room. He skidded to a stop at Celestia's front hooves, who had heard everything.

She used her magic and raised him up to eye level, "Ex-prince Blueblood, you are hereby placed under arrest for treason to the crown and attempted assassination of a hero of Canterlot," she turned to her guards, "Take him away."

Because of his improved hearing, John could barely hear Celestia whisper to Blueblood as he passed her, "I hope you like bananas." He would have thought about it a little more, but Celestia was now walking towards him. She stopped next to his bed and spoke to him quietly, "You know, the entire city is worried about you; especially

those five guards you fought with."

John thought about each of those ponies and how well they had fought together. It had felt good to be part of team again.

"Can you walk?" Celestia asked.

"Yes, ma'am." John rolled out of the tiny bed frame and stood. However, he felt more exposed than ever. He wanted his armor back; he felt weak without it. "Did anything happen while I was out?"

"Not very much; We brought back that set of armor from the Covenant ship for the hunter worms and have begun repairs on the city." She was right, nothing much had happened. "By the way, the guard Neon Fire is requesting your presence at the bar in the barracks; I would suggest going; she won't respect you until you beat her in a drinking contest. She's weird that way, since she won't respect anyone even if they save her life multiple times." Celestia looked at him, waiting for his answer.

John merely grunted. He disapproved of such activity, since it impacted how someone reacted during active duty. However, he would need her respect and the other guards' if they needed to work together again. "Fine."

Celestia had a small smile on her face as she led John from the room and through the castle. About ten minutes later, they reached the door to a room that he could hear many voices behind. Celestia hesitated for a moment, and then pushed open the door and walked in with John following close behind.

It looked more like a casino than a bar, since there were games of poker on almost every table. Lunar and Day guards sat at these, each occasionally tossing a golden coin into the center of the table. However, there was one table that was devoid of any cards or coins. A lone Lunar guard sat at this table and was easily identifiable by her neon green mane.

The whole room fell silent as they noticed John. For a few seconds, nothing happened, and then all the ponies in the room parted, forming a path for him and the princess to follow. Unsurprisingly, it led straight to Neon Fire.

She looked up, seeing the one she had challenged. A fire almost literally lit up in her eyes because of excitement. The unicorn used her magic and pulled up a second chair, along with a couple of kegs of cider.

"So, you showed up huh? Prepare for defeat!" More guards gathered around, excited to see this showdown; Neon Fire had a reputation for being able to outdrink any stallion or mare in the guard.

John sat down carefully, the chair groaning in protest at heavy weight. Neon reached out with a hoof and pulled her custom-made drinking mug close to her. It was made of glass, which had been exquisitely formed into flames. As she poured her first mug of cider, John saw that it had been designed to look like it was on fire as a liquid passed through it.

She set down her mug and watched John closely as he filled his own

(non-custom) mug. He looked into the golden fermented drink and then set it down with his giant hand wrapped around the handle. He looked Neon Fire in the eyes, feeling the spark of challenge light up within him; he would gain her respect, no matter what.

Celestia walked over to the small, round table and looked to both contestants, raising her right hoof slowly. "Defender, are you ready?" asked Celestia, turning to Neon Fire.

"Yes, ma'am."

Celestia turned to John, "Challenger, are you ready?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The tension in the room could almost literally be cut by a knife because of the unicorns. John stared into the rambunctious yet kind mare's eyes. As she returned the look, she saw within his eyes the hardness of a soldier who has fought for decades in war.

Just as it seemed one of the contestants would burst a vein, Celestia's hoof slammed down onto the ground.

"Go!"

Camo Flash groaned and slowly opened his eyes, seeing only the bed directly above him where Book Master lay, quietly breathing in and out. As he rolled out of the slightly comfortable bed, he glanced at the clock.

"What?! It's that late already?!" He quickly stood up on his hind legs and used his front hooves to support himself on Book's bed. "Book Master! Wake up!"

Book's eyes snapped open and almost seemed instantly awake. "What do you need Camo? I'm still tired from exerting myself so much during the battle."

Camo rolled his eyes. "You weren't even moving that much! In fact, your eyes were closed for most of the battle!" Camo knew very well why Book had had his eyes closed; he had needed the concentration necessary for the spells he had used. However, Camo currently felt like being a sarcastic smartass. Suddenly, he felt the familiar grip of Book's red magic as he was pushed away from the bed and Book burrowed further into his pillow. "C'mon, Book! We're going to miss Neon Fire's challenge against the human!"

At this, Book Master jumped off the bed and trotted to the door, carrying Camo with him the entire time. As he reached the door of the barracks, he ungracefully dropped Camo onto the ground in a jumbled heap.

Looking back, he called out in a calm voice, "Camo, you taking a nap again? Let's go!" The pair walked out of the empty barracks into the light of Celestia's sun. They crossed the small plaza to a larger building where they could shout of excitement.

Camo pushed open the wooden door to the bar, seeing absolute chaos. Many of the stallions and mares were yelling at each other on who they thought could win. Camo and Book easily found a way through the

shouting crowd, spotting Iron and Silent Scout holding a couple of spots for the two, right next to the table where John and Neon sat.

As Camo took his spot, he observed that although John drank his cider with a steady pace and would calmly refill his mug, Neon would continue drinking like there was no tomorrow. He glanced at the tally board and saw that Neon had a lot more marks than John.

He leaned over to Scout, shouting into his ear, "Looks like Neon is going to win again huh?" Scout merely grunted in reply, paying more attention to the actual contest.

Just as it seemed that neither contestant could drink anymore, Neon keeled over, stood up and muttered a few unintelligible words, and then collapsed to the ground onto her back, plump belly jiggling. John looked at her, mug halfway to his mouth, and then calmly set it down.

As he stood, the whole room went silent in shock. None of them had ever seen Neon Fire beaten in a drinking contest. One of them even took a swig from John's mug to make sure it had alcohol in it.

After confirming that it in fact did, Celestia shouted out, "Mares and gentlecolts, I present to you, the new champion of drinking, John, Spartan-117!"

As the crowd of guards started cheering, John motioned to Celestia, stating he needed to speak with her. She followed him outside into the bright sunlight. Before he could speak though, she quickly asked him, "How did you do it? I mean you don't even appear to be drunk."

He gave her a bemused look before saying, "It was the chemical augmentations I received. They changed my metabolism, so I can't get drunk."

Celestia nodded in slight understanding, before motioning him to speak of what he had originally brought her out here for. "Celestia, where is Lyra?"

The question caught her off guard, not only because she knew, but also because she had no idea he was so observant. But still, she played on. "Why do you ask John? How do you know she didn't just go back to Ponyville?"

This time when he looked at her, there was not a trace of emotion present on his face. His stone-like expression drove into her very soul. He continued in a very guarded voice, "From the few minutes I knew her, she was obsessed with humans. If she acted anything like I thought she would, she would have stayed behind to observe me."

Celestia sighed again and hung her head in defeat. After a few seconds, she rose her head and looked up into John's eyes. "I hate to tell you this John, but Lyra was taken by the changelings."

"John, maybe you should consider sitting this one out," stated Cortana as her blue magic pieced together his Mjolnir armor. When he simply grunted in reply, she sighed in exasperation. "Look, you won't

even have me there to watch your back this time."

She knew that to him, it was more of a sense of duty than a debt or anything to this Lyra. He had stated he would stay long enough to help with the frigate, grab a warthog, and then be gone. In fact, he wouldn't even take any reinforcements, simply saying that they would get in the way.

She levitated his helmet onto his skull, where it locked into place with a hiss and then a pop. Suddenly, a guard burst through the door, "Princess Cortana! Chief!"

After a few stumbling steps he regained his composure and saluted snappily at the pair. Cortana returned the salute and motioned for the guard to continue. "Ma'am, there's a problem down in the Crystal Caverns. Two creatures came out of nowhere and one of them is using a weird type of glowing sword."

John's head snapped up, and promptly walked over to a rack where he grabbed one of the spears set there. "Let's go."

On their way to the throne room they ran into Luna, who just nodded and joined them in their fast pace. They quickly descended down the steep stairway and reached the bottom in no time. They practically ran after the guard, who could hear the sounds of his comrades defending against the odd beast.

They finally reached the Forerunner doors, which were mysteriously wide open. At the mouth stood a Sangheili warrior, an elder by the designs of his robes. Around him, there were several bodies, but John's armor checked their vitals and saw that they were just fine.

While the elite was distracted, John melted into the shadows and began to flank the alien. Once he got into a good position, he grabbed the spear, jumped out, and swept the elite's legs from underneath him. As he darted over and raised the spear for the killing blow, the elite swung his sword and off the front half of the wooden spear.

He quickly kicked John in the midsection and rolled away to his feet. He activated the energy sword again, bloodlust beginning to fill his eyes.

Suddenly, a very familiar voice cried from the Composer's prison, "John?!"

The elite and John stopped in their tracks to see who had spoken. An elderly woman with grey hair and a white lab coat walked out of the room, staring in wonder at the Spartan.

As she got close to the super soldier, Luna stepped in and held her back with a hoof, "Just who do you two think you are? We don't know you, so We don't trust you."

John pulled Luna back with his hand, speaking softly at the same time, "It's okay, Princess Luna, I know her. Her name is--"

He was cut off by the older woman, who straightened her lab coat as she spoke, "With me is Arbiter Thel Vadam of the Sangheili, and I, am

Doctor Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, creator of the Spartan program."

13. Bonus Chapter 1: The Vision

John opened his dirt-encrusted eyes, and after a brief moment of pause, quickly sat up. He looked down at his hands, realizing he was not in his normal armor, and only in a set of civilian clothing.

Ignoring his own temporary discomfort, he stood and analyzed his environment. As far as he could see, it was nothing but an endless desert made of white sands. The wind picked up tenfold and the sand began cutting into his skin. Raising a hand to shield his eyes from the miniature missiles, he pressed on further into the endless wasteland.

He continued to walk for about another ten minutes, trekking over sand dunes, sliding down them, and still shielding his eyes. As he came to the crest of another dune, he spotted a figure in the distance on top of another dune in the distance.

Figuring it was probably another lost human, he found the wind shift directly into his face, almost as though it did not want him to meet this figure. Still ignoring the stinging grains, he pushed on, his journey not made easy by the blowing sands.

He finally came within ten feet of the figure, who he could now see was wearing some type of tattered, old cloak. He attempted to see past the hood, but to no avail. After a moment's hesitation, this new figure trudged past John, further into the desolate landscape.

John reached out to place a hand on its shoulder, "Identify yourself." However, his hand came short by a few inches thanks to a particularly strong gust of wind. Any further attempts at communicating with it were in vain. So, he decided to just follow this figure and see where they were going.

There were many times when John almost lost sight of the mysterious figure, barely catching its footprints before they faded. By the time John caught up with the figure, which just kept walking and ignoring him, his clothes were in tatters.

Eventually, the figure finally stopped at the top of a particularly rocky dune and looked out upon the desert. As John looked at it, all he could describe as was flat. After another ten miles or so, odd rock formations made strange, arching rocks.

Suddenly, John felt what could be described as a familiar energy in the air; Forerunner energy. Looking around, he raised his fists, ready for a fight. The figure simply stood there, watching quietly as the black rocks around them began to float into the air.

John could feel the energy building around him, and as he waited for it to activate and destroy both him and the figure, it just stopped. The rocks around them collapsed to the ground, almost as though they had never moved.

A deep rumbling and shaking in the ground brought John's attention to

the sand field in front of them. As he watched, the entire center of the field appeared to collapse in on itself, raising a dust storm that could smother a city. In the center of the collapsed area, he watched something begin rise up out of the dust. The cloak of dust made it appear enormous.

It began to shed its sand armor, allowing John to see orange "eyes" within the shroud. The figure watched, almost as though it expected this, and raised a hand to shield its own eyes. As the shadow the object cast enveloped John and the figure, most of the sand had fallen off, revealing angled, metal structures, very similar to the Forerunners' style of architecture.

It now almost appeared to make a type of winged staff, like a giant caduceus. The metal forming the "staff" of the object began to spread apart, revealing more orange lights along its length.

Movement from the cloaked figure drew John's attention to it, seeing it reaching with a hand into its dusty, brown cloak. As John watched, a rather familiar gauntleted hand pulled out what seemed to be dog tags. John walked up behind it and looked into the Mjolnir-wearing figure's hand, to see Cortana's broken data chip strung on a chain.

Hearing more movement from the Forerunner object, John looked quickly back up to it. The metal pieces that had broken off of the "staff" were now spreading out to its sides, much like how a bird spreads its wings in preparation for flight, just in slow motion.

As the wings reached their fully outspread position, a wave of energy burst forth from it, forcing John to take a step back and the figure's hood to blow back. John looked on in shock, as he recognized his own damaged Mjolnir armor with a cracked visor.

John watched as his other self closed his fist around the data chip in conviction, slowly raising his head to face the Forerunner "bird", which UNSC records had described as a possible Forerunner "War Sphinx".

Suddenly, the entire landscape just blows away like the sand from earlier as John's consciousness raced towards a pinpoint of light.

"John! Wake up!" He slowly sat up from the hospital bed, which he had been placed into after collapsing next to the Composer.

Looking to his right, he saw Cortana, who had been shaking his shoulder in an attempt to wake him up. She sighed in relief as he looked at her with his ever-stoic expression. "I sensed a magical residue within your brain. Anything you would care to share as to what happened in your dreams?"

Recalling the memories, he gave her a slow account of what had happened, watching as her face became more curious by the second. When he finally finished his tale, she held up a hoof, telling him to wait.

She trotted out of the hospital room, presumably towards the library. After several minutes of waiting, she came back. "John, I cross-referenced several books with the type of magic I felt around

your cerebral cortex, and then looked into some of the books on prophecies of dreams." She sighed a bit before giving a small smile, "Gonne have to get used to having lungs." Finally able to deliver the news, she told him, "John, I believe you saw a vision of the future."

14. The Journey Begins

"I, am Doctor Catherine Elizabeth Halsey, creator of the Spartan program."

The ending of the sentence echoed around the room, bouncing off of the crystals and into the ears of the present ponies, seemingly taunting them. All of them stood there, staring at her, even the Arbiter. Apparently, he had not been told that she had made the Spartans. The guards however, had no idea what she was talking about.

Halsey was suddenly jerked backwards by midnight blue magic and thrown onto the floor. She cried out in pain as she landed on her elbow wrong. A blue shape zipped past John and pinned Halsey to the glass-like floor.

"So it was you! It was you who kidnapped John and forced him into a military life!" Luna's eyes were filled with rage as she seemingly stared directly into Halsey's soul. "Why did you do it? Why did you take him away from a life full of fun and surprises? Was it for an experiment? Just to say you did it?"

Halsey's own emotions ran over her face like a slide show, starting with anger, and progressing through suspicion, thoughtful, and finally settled onto neutrality. "I regret what I did to them every waking moment. But it had to be done, or else there would have been a complete collapse of government. Drastic military action needed to be taken against the rebellion."

Her explanation did little to calm the protective princess. "I care nothing for your excuses. I will eliminate anyone involved with their indoctrination, starting with you." She began to charge her horn to blast the woman into dust, but a blur she saw in her peripheral vision forced her to change her spell from offensive, to defensive, forming a shield around her.

It was a good thing she did too, as the Chief barreled into the blue shield. The shield cracked under the pressure, and Luna was pushed to the right several yards. Many of the guards stood there in shock. The Master Chief had just been on their side, assisting with the recent changeling invasion, and now he was attacking one of the princesses?

However, once they overcame their shock, they surrounded John, forming a circle around him with their spears pointed inwards. Arbiter pushed through the line of guards, quickly taking his place in a back-to-back with John. "Just like old times, hmm Spartan?"

John merely nodded in response, thinking of different strategies to use to fight the guards. He didn't want to kill any of them, leaving Canterlot vulnerable to another invasion, so he'd have to be careful

when he did knock them out. He quickly switched the spear so that the blunt end was pointing forward and not the bladed end.

The tension in the room began to rise, Luna watching with worry, hoping it wouldn't break out into a fight, but still in shock from John's 'betrayal' to say anything to stop it. Right as it seemed that one of the groups would attack, Cortana finally spoke up. "Are you all stupid? Of course he would protect her! She's practically a mother to him." She used an emphasis on the word him, as if to show that it was to only him, and not her as well. "Isn't loyalty one of your principals to live by? She gave him and made him everything he is today, and has always supported him for the past twenty-seven years. How long has he known you? Three days."

She walked through the line of guards, and in front of the spears, forcing them to withdraw, lest they somehow injure one of the princesses. After having her guards withdraw their weapons, Luna watched as the new princess walked up to Halsey and the two began to talk.

"Hello Doctor," said Cortana, her voice carefully guarded against the human genius. "I trust you have an explanation for how you got here?"

Halsey carefully examined the neon blue alicorn, before realization dawned upon her face. "As usual, I do Cortana. Back at Installation 03, a Forerunner artifact had been discovered; a portal. They had me examine it, I opened it, and it led here."

However, Halsey seemed to be far from done speaking. "This brings up more than one question. First, where exactly are we, and second, how do you have your own body. I can easily see that it's completely organic."

"The only way it can be described is molecular construction at an atomic level. I am aware of just how impossible it seems that a body was built around my conscious, but that's what actually happened." John and Thel continued to stand back facing the guards, but at a more relaxed position than ready to attack.

"My thinking processes are in no way slowed by this body, and now with larger physical storage areas for information, I can categorize all the information learned and no longer have to deal with rampancy." Halsey seemed incredibly impressed with this new level of biotic advancement, but never voiced her amazement.

Acting as though she had just noticed the guards, Halsey spoke out to Luna, "You don't need these guards to treat us as enemies. Thel and John only acted in my defense, and I promise not to kidnap any of your foals."

Suddenly, a voice spoke to her from directly behind her. "Do you Pinkie Promise?" The new arrival caused everyone in the room to jump and realize Pinkie was floating in the air next to Halsey. The scientist stared at the pink mare, who slowly floated back down to the ground. However, instead of actually touching down, she just sank through the floor until nothing remained.

After a few more seconds, Halsey finally spoke up. "I must be more tired than I thought. Do you have a bed or someplace I can sleep?"

Luna, still confused as everybody else, just nodded and motioned for one of the guards to escort her to another guest bedroom.

Chief was the next one to recover, Arbiter following not too far behind. "Princesses, I really need to leave soon. Are we going to check the frigate or not?"

His statement is what finally brought Luna back to the real world. "Yes, I will teleport Cortana, you, and I first to the drop pod to retrieve your weapons, then to the frigate itself. Thel cannot come with us, as he is still too much of an unknown."

John just nodded to show that he was ready for teleportation. Luna's horn began charging up and Cortana studied it closely so she could replicate the spell later on. As Luna finished charging said spell, she teleported herself and the other two beings all the way into the Everfree Forest.

Looking around they found themselves surrounded by trees that were in no way harmed by John's arrival. "I'm sorry, but you'll have to forgive me; the magic currents in the Everfree are still in flux from your landing. We shouldn't be too far from your pod."

Using her magic, she used a sensing spell to locate Chief's pod. "While I did say the magic was in flux, I can do basic spells. Your pod is in this direction." She turned in that direction she ended up facing and began walking with John and Cortana following close behind.

True to her word, they were able to reach the drop pod and its scattered contents in less than ten minutes. John immediately began picking up, checking, and stashing the weapons that lay around him, causing Luna to jump when he activated the energy sword.

Cortana watched with growing unease, until she finally couldn't keep quiet any longer. "John, why do you say you have to go alone? I know it's because you say have a sense of duty and that's why, but I feel like that's not it, is t?"

John finished putting the last of the weapons into a portable carry case. Snapping the latches shut, he replied to Cortana. "When I carried her out to Canterlot during the changeling attack, she seemed so innocent, like a child almost. I feel that in saving, I can forgive myself for failing to save so many civilians."

Cortana let out a sigh, "Fine, I will not try to convince you not to go anymore. Now, let's get to the Dawn to see if we can find a working air or land vehicle."

Luna charged her horn and teleported the trio close to the Dawn. When they reappeared, Luna seemed to be out of breath and rather unsteady on her hooves. When Cortana moved to help her, she held up a hoof. "I am fine now. It was just a little bit of magic deprivation."

John and Cortana nodded and began moving in the direction of the Forward Unto Dawn, which was pretty hard to miss with its colossal shape looming over them. The distance to it was misleading yet again, as it took them twenty minutes to get there, instead of the perceived seven.

Upon arrival, several guards snapped to salutes and the many scientists bowed. One of the volunteered scientists, a unicorn stood up out of his bow and walked forward to Luna. "Princess, as per your orders, we have awaited the human's arrival to actually enter the structure. And now with your permission, we would like to enter."

Instead of answering the scientist, Luna looked to Cortana. Cortana studied the scientist for a few seconds, then answering, "Fine, go ahead. But I will only allow small groups to go in at a time and with me as their escort."

The scientist looked as though he wanted to protest, but kept his mouth shut, face turning red from resisting his urge to demand that the order come from an 'actual princess'. Finally, he was able to answer. "Yes, your highness."

Cortana shared a look with Luna before moving to accompany the first group. Luna looked over to John next. "It is a shame that they do not see her as a princess yet, but they will after her coronation." She looked up to the massive ship before turning away and walking a little more back into the forest. She turned back to John and said, "I will not see you again before you leave, so this is farewell for now, and good luck."

John nodded to her as acknowledgement and she teleported back to Canterlot to talk with the Arbiter. Finally alone for the first time in several days, John walked to the base of the Dawn, finding an entry hatch hidden from the nosy scientists and crawled through.

Once inside, he studied the infrastructure that was immediately around him. Some of the metal seemed to be under a bit of stress, and more wires were hanging down than when he and Cortana first left, but it mostly looked the same.

He pulled up a map on armor, and upon finding the small red dot that showed his position, began his trek first to the docking bay to look for a Pelican, Falcon, or even Broadsword that was still in prime condition.

On his trek, he had to make several detours, as he found that despite the ship's good condition, there were several caved in corridors. With the many detours he had to go, it took him a good thirty minutes to reach the bay.

The docking bay for aircraft was in bad condition. Several of the larger beams holding up the ceiling had collapsed onto the aircraft below, crushing the three Falcons, disabling one of the two Pelicans and burying the other, and trapping the one remaining Broadsword in its holding area.

Finding no luck here, he changed course to the vehicle bay to look for a Warthog. A Mongoose would be too small to carry the supplies he needed, and a Scorpion, while heavily armored with an incredible amount of firepower, was too slow and required too much gas.

His journey to the vehicle depot took considerably less time, since it was much closer, and there were nowhere near as many caved in corridors. Upon arrival, he could easily see that the vehicle depot

was in much better condition compared to the docking bay.

Held within, were two functional Scorpions, one of all four types of Warthogs, six Mongooses, and even a brute Chopper they had picked up from Earth. He picked his way through the piles of smaller debris until he came to the troop transport 'Hog.

After lifting up the hood and checking that everything within was in working order, he jumped into the driver seat and activated the vehicle. The engine made its regular growling noise as it started up, eventually settling into that purring noise cars make when they sit idle.

After letting it run for about ten seconds, John shifted into gear and skillfully drove the Warthog out of the minefield of debris. When he finally reached the doors that led to the outside, usually meant for Pelicans to get in, grab a vehicle, and get out, he jumped out and pressed one of the buttons on the side. The giant doors slowly began to open, eventually making an area wide enough for John to get through.

Fortunately, the door to get out was only about five feet above the ground, an easy jump for the Warthog. The look on the scientists' and soldiers' faces were priceless when what appeared to them to be a giant snarling cat on wheels jumped out of the dormant ship and landed directly in front of them.

Many of the soldiers got ready to attack, watching the 'beast' carefully. However, they all realized it was harmless when saw the Chief climb out. One of the higher ranking guards trotted up to him, chuckling a bit. "Sir, could you please warn us before you do something like that again?"

John stared at him for a second from behind his visor, before simply nodding and heading back into the ship to gather supplies. Many of the guards shared concerned looks; it worried them that the Bane of Changelings was going alone. He had become popular among the guard after the changeling attack, but had become a legend after out-drinking Neon Fire. But, it was not for them to decide, so they all returned to their duties. That is, except for a few of the guardsâ€¦|

After another half hour aboard the downed frigate, John had all the supplies he'd need. Plenty of gas, four weeks' worth of food if he rationed, at least one of every type of weapon he could find, including dual plasma rifles, his energy sword, and a gravity hammer.

He was loading all of these items into boxes and then lifting them up into the Warthog, when he saw a group of guards pulling and pushing another cargo box to him. When they finally got there, several guards panting from the exertion, their leader said to him, "For everything you've done, we wanted to give you some equipment of our own. Inside, you'll find several enchanted weapons; a mace made to spew flames as you use it, a shield made of the strongest metal and almost indestructible, a spell book with some of the most powerful spells ever known, a spear made so that you can throw it over a thousand meters, and a ring made so that you can become more stealthy."

The captain stopped for a second to catch his breath after the long

speech, then he and the other guards backed away from the large crate, hoping he would take it. John stood there for a second watching them, before sighing and lifting that crate as well into the Warthog.

The captain smiled, and then he and the other guards turned and got out of John's way. The Chief walked around the Warthog, strapping the numerous crates into the back of the large vehicle. When everything was finally in place, John left to go find Cortana.

After asking several scientists, who backed away in fear at first, he found her coming back out of the Dawn with a group of guards. When she reached him, it was as though she knew what he was going to ask. "One of the groups I took in with me found an armory, and I had to take them out and bring a few guards with me to secure it."

John understood, not that they could tell what he was thinking behind the green and gold helmet. Instead, he looked to Cortana and said, "I'm ready. I only came to give you a farewell."

Suddenly, her face turned from being mildly happy, to slightly depressed. She lowered her head as she spoke. "It'll be weird, not going with you. However, I will wish you luck and give you one last bit of help. Let's go to your Warthog."

They all walked to the vehicle, the guards giving it odd looks but otherwise ignoring it. However, once he jumped in and started it, they all jumped backwards, startled. At Cortana's bemused look, they all became a little embarrassed at being so easily scared.

Cortana just rolled her eyes, before turning back to John, a solemn look upon her snout. "Well, this is it. I am going to teleport you to the edge of the Everfree Forest, and then you're on your own."

She started charging her horn, just as she had memorized Luna doing. When she finished charging it, she spoke to Master Chief one last time before sending him off. "Give 'em hell soldier."

With that flash, John was transported from the Dawn all the way to the edge of a vast desert. He looked across the daunting distance and to the mountains just on the horizon. Knowing the journey would take him quite a while and would test his mental capacities more than anything since he hadn't done something like this before, he sat for a few moments, and making sure he had everything, he began to press down on one of the six pedals.

That's when he heard something moving behind him.

End
file.